

ELLERY QUEEN

THE ROMAN HAT MYSTERY

THE FRENCH POWDER MYSTERY

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THE ELLERY QUEEN OMNIBUS

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NEW YORK

GROSSET & DUNLAP

PUBLISHERS

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OMNIBUS

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THE
MYSTERY
THE FRENCH POWDER MYSTERY

NEW YORK
GROSSET & DUNLAP
PUBLISHERS

Printed in the United States of America

GRATEFUL ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Is MADE TO

PROFESSOR ALEXANDER GOETTLER

Chief Toxicologist of the City of New York

FOR HIS FRIENDLY OFFICES

IN THE PREPARATION OF THIS TALE

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FOREWORD

I HAVE been asked by both publisher and author to write a cursory preface to the story of Monte Field's murder. Let me say at once that I am neither a writer nor a criminologist. To make authoritative remarks, therefore, anent the techniques of crime and crime-fiction is obviously beyond my capacity. Nevertheless, I have one legitimate claim to the privilege of introducing this remarkable story, based as it is upon perhaps the most mystifying crime of the past decade. . . . If it were not for me, "The Roman Hat Mystery" would never have reached the fiction-reading public. I am responsible for its having been brought to light; and there my pallid connection with it ends.

During the past winter I shook off the dust of New York and went a-traveling in Europe. In the course of a capricious roving about the corners of the Continent (a roving induced by that boredom which comes to every Conrad in quest of his youth)—I found myself one August day in a tiny Italian mountain-village. How I got there, its location and its name do not matter; a promise is a promise, even when it is made by a stockbroker. Dimly I remembered that this toy hamlet perched on the lip of a sierra harbored two old friends whom I had not seen for two years. They had come from the seething sidewalks of New York to bask in the brilliant peace of an Italian countryside—well, perhaps it was as much curiosity about

their regrets as anything else, that prompted me to intrude upon their solitude.

My reception at the hands of old Richard Queen, keener and grayer than ever, and of his son Ellery was cordial enough. We had been more than friends in the old days; perhaps, too, the vinous air of Italy was too heady a cure for their dust-choked Manhattan memories. In any case, they seemed profoundly glad to see me. Mrs. Ellery Queen—Ellery was now the husband of a glorious creature and the startled father of an infant who resembled his grandfather to an extraordinary degree—was as gracious as the name she bore. Even Djuna, no longer the scape-grace I had known, greeted me with every sign of nostalgia.

Despite Ellery's desperate efforts to make me forget New York and appreciate the lofty beauties of his local scenery, I had not been in their tiny villa for many days before a devilish notion took possession of me and I began to pester poor Ellery to death. I have something of a reputation for persistence, if no other virtue; so that before I left, Ellery in despair agreed to compromise. He took me into his library, locked the door and attacked an old steel filing-cabinet. After a slow search he managed to bring out what I suspect was under his fingers all the time. It was a faded manuscript bound Ellery-like in blue legal paper.

The argument raged. I wished to leave his beloved Italian shores with the manuscript in my trunk, whereas he insisted that the sheaf of contention remain hidden in the cabinet. Old Richard was wrenched away from his desk, where he was writing a treatise for a German magazine on "American Crime and Methods of Detection," to settle the affair. Mrs. Queen held her husband's arm as

he was about to close the incident with a workmanlike fist; Djuna clucked gravely; and even Ellery, Jr., extracted his pudgy hand from his mouth long enough to make a comment in the gurgle-language of his kind.

The upshot of it all was that "The Roman Hat Mystery" went back to the States in my luggage. Not unconditionally, however—Ellery is a peculiar man. I was forced solemnly and by all I held dear to swear that the identities of my friends and of the important characters concerned in the story be veiled by pseudonyms; and that, on pain of instant annihilation, their names be permanently withheld from the reading public.

Consequently "Richard Queen" and "Ellery Queen" are not the true names of those gentlemen. Ellery himself made the selections; and I might add at once that his choices were deliberately contrived to baffle the reader who might endeavor to ferret the truth from some apparent clue of anagram.

"The Roman Hat Mystery" is based on records actually to be found in the police archives of New York City. Ellery and his father, as usual, worked hand-in-hand on the case. During this period in his career Ellery was a detective-story writer of no mean reputation. Adhering to the aphorism that truth is often stranger than fiction, it was his custom to make notes of interesting investigations for possible use in his murder tales. The affair of the Hat so fascinated him that he kept unusually exhaustive notes, at his leisure coördinating the whole into fiction form, intending to publish it. Immediately after, however, he was plunged into another investigation which left him scant opportunity for business; and when this last case was successfully closed, Ellery's father, the Inspector, consummated a lifelong ambition by retiring and moving to

Italy, bag and baggage. Ellery, who had in this affair * found the lady of his heart, was animated by a painful desire to do something "big" in letters; Italy sounded idyllic to him; he married with his father's blessing and the three of them, accompanied by Djuna, went off to their new European home. The manuscript was utterly forgotten until I rescued it.

On one point, before I close this painfully unhandsome preface, I should like to make myself clear.

I have always found it extremely difficult to explain to strangers the peculiar affinity which bound Richard to Ellery Queen, as I must call them. For one thing, they are persons of by no means uncomplicated natures. Richard Queen, sprucely middle-aged after thirty-two years' service in the city police, earned his Inspector's chevrons not so much through diligence as by an extraordinary grasp of the technique of criminal investigation. It was said, for example, at the time of his brilliant detectival efforts during the now-ancient Barnaby-Ross murder-case,† that "Richard Queen by this feat firmly establishes his fame beside such masters of crime-detection as Tamaka Hiero, Brillon the Frenchman, Kris Oliver, Renaud, and James Redix the Younger." **

Queen, with his habitual shyness toward newspaper eulogy, was the first to scoff at this extravagant statement; although Ellery maintains that for many years the old man secretly preserved a clipping of the story. However that may be—and I like to think of Richard Queen in terms

* "The Mimic Murders." This crime in its fiction form has not yet reached the public. J. J. McC.

† Ellery Queen made his bow as his father's unofficial counsel during this investigation.

** Chicago Press, January 16, 191-.

of human personality, despite the efforts of imaginative journalists to make a legend of him—I cannot emphasize too strongly the fact that he was heavily dependent upon his son's wit for success in many of his professional achievements.

This is not a matter of public knowledge. Some mementoes of their careers are still reverently preserved by friends: the small bachelor establishment maintained during their American residence on West 87th Street, and now a semi-private museum of curios collected during their productive years; the really excellent portrait of father and son, done by Thiraud and hanging in the art-gallery of an anonymous millionaire; Richard's precious snuff-box, the Florentine antique which he had picked up at an auction and which he thereafter held dearer than rubies, only to succumb to the blandishments of a charming old lady whose name he cleared of slander; Ellery's enormous collection of books on violence, perhaps as complete as any in the world, which he regretfully discarded when the Queens left for Italy; and, of course, the many as yet unpublished documents containing records of cases solved by the Queens and now stored away from prying eyes in the City's police archives.

But the things of the heart—the spiritual bonds between father and son—have until this time remained secret from all except a few favored intimates, among whom I was fortunate enough to be numbered. The old man, perhaps the most famous executive of the Detective Division in the last half-century, overshadowing in public renown, it is to be feared, even those gentlemen who sat briefly in the Police Commissioner's suite—the old man, let me repeat, owed a respectable portion of his reputation to his son's genius.

In matters of pure tenacity, when possibilities lay frankly open on every hand, Richard Queen was a peerless investigator. He had a crystal-clear mind for detail; a retentive memory for complexities of motive and plot; a cool viewpoint when the obstacle seemed insuperable. Give him a hundred facts, bungled and torn, out of proportion and sequence, and he had them assembled in short order. He was like a bloodhound who follows the true scent in the clutter of a hopelessly tangled trail.

But the intuitive sense, the gift of imagination, belonged to Ellery Queen, the fiction writer. The two might have been twins possessing abnormally developed faculties of mind, impotent by themselves but vigorous when applied one to the other. Richard Queen, far from resenting the bond which made his success so spectacularly possible—as a less generous nature might have done—took pains to make it plain to his friends. The slender, gray old man whose name was anathema to contemporary lawbreakers, used to utter his “confession,” as he called it, with a *naïveté* explicable only on the score of his proud fatherhood.

One word more. Of all the affairs pursued by the two Queens this, which Ellery has titled “The Roman Hat Mystery” for reasons shortly to be made clear, was surely the crowning case of them all. The dilettante of criminology, the thoughtful reader of detective literature, will understand as the tale unfolds why Ellery considers the murder of Monte Field worthy of study. The average murderer’s motives and habits are fairly accessible to the criminal specialist. Not so, however, in the case of the Field killer. Here the Queens dealt with a person of delicate perception and extraordinary finesse. In fact, as Richard pointed out shortly after the *dénouement*, the

crime planned was as nearly perfect as human ingenuity could make it. As in so many "perfect crimes," however, a small mischance of fate coupled with Ellery's acute deductive analyses gave the hunting Queens the single clue which led ultimately to the destruction of the plotter.

J. J. McC.

NEW YORK,
March 1, 1929.

LEXICON OF PERSONS CONNECTED WITH THE INVESTIGATION

NOTE: The complete list of individuals, male and female, brought into the story of Monte Field's murder and appended below is given solely for the convenience of the reader. It is intended to simplify rather than mystify. In the course of perusing mysterio-detective literature the reader is, like as not, apt to lose sight of a number of seemingly unimportant characters who eventually prove of primary significance in the solution of the crime. The writer therefore urges a frequent study of this chart during the reader's pilgrimage through the tale, if toward no other end than to ward off the inevitable cry of "Unfair!"—the consolation of those who read and do not reason.

E. Q.

MONTE FIELD, an important personage indeed—the victim.

WILLIAM PUSAK, clerk. Cranially a brachycephalic.

DOYLE, a *gendarme* with brains.

LOUIS PANZER, a Broadway theatre-manager.

JAMES PEALE, the Don Juan of "Gunplay."

EVE ELLIS. The quality of friendship is not strained.

STEPHEN BARRY. One can understand the perturbation of the juvenile lead.

LUCILLE HORTON, the "lady of the streets"—in the play.

HILDA ORANGE, a celebrated English character-actress.

THOMAS VELIE, Detective-Sergeant who knows a thing or two about crime.

HESSE, PIGGOTT, FLINT, JOHNSON, HAGSTROM, RITTER, gentlemen of the Homicide Squad.

DR SAMUEL PROUTY, Assistant to the Chief Medical Examiner.

MADGE O'CONNELL, usherette on the fatal aisle.
 DR. STUTTGARD. There is always a doctor in the audience.
 JESS LYNCH, the obliging orangeade-boy.
 JOHN CAZZANELLI, *alias* "PARSON JOHNNY," naturally takes
 a professional interest in "Gunplay."
 BENJAMIN MORGAN. What do you make of him?
 FRANCES IVES-POPE. Enter the society interest.
 STANFORD IVES-POPE, man-about-town.
 HARRY NEILSON. He revels in the sweet uses of publicity.
 HENRY SAMPSON, for once an intelligent District Attorney.
 CHARLES MICHAELS, the fly—or the spider?
 MRS. ANGELA RUSSO, a lady of reputation.
 TIMOTHY CRONIN, a legal ferret.
 ARTHUR STOATES, another.
 OSCAR LEWIN, the Charon of the dead man's office.
 FRANKLIN IVES-POPE. If wealth meant happiness—
 MRS. FRANKLIN IVES-POPE, a maternal hypochrondiac.
 MRS. PHILLIPS. Middle-aged angels have their uses.
 DR. THADDEUS JONES, toxicologist of the City of New York.
 EDMUND CREWE, architectural expert attached to the Detective
 Bureau.
 DJUNA, an Admirable Crichton of a new species.

The Problem Is—

WHO KILLED MONTE FIELD?

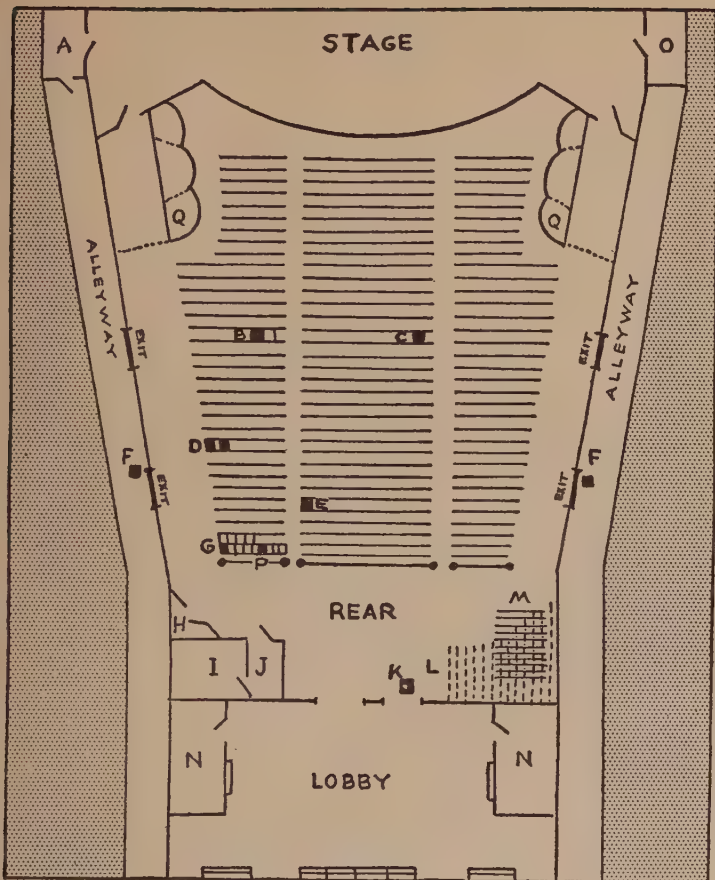
Meet the astute gentlemen whose business
 it is to discover such things—

MR. RICHARD QUEEN

MR. ELLERY QUEEN

EXPLANATION FOR THE
MAP OF THE ROMAN THEATRE

- A: Actors' dressing-rooms.
B: Frances Ives-Pope's seat.
C: Benjamin Morgan's seat.
D: Aisle-seats occupied by "Parson Johnny" Cazzanelli and Madge O'Connell.
E: Dr. Stuttgard's seat.
F, F: Orangeade boys' stands (only during intermissions).
G: Area in vicinity of crime. Black square represents seat occupied by Monte Field. Three white squares to the right and four white squares directly in front represent vacant seats.
H: Publicity office, occupied by Harry Neilson.
I: Manager Louis Panzer's private office.
J: Anteroom to manager's office.
K: Ticket-taker's box.
L: Only stairway leading to the balcony.
M: Stairway leading downstairs to General Lounge.
N, N: Cashiers' offices.
O: Property Room.
P: William Pusak's seat.
Q, Q: Orchestra boxes.



*Map of the Roman Theatre
Drawn by Ellery Queen*

PART ONE

"The policeman must oft follow the precept of the 'bakadori'—those fool-birds who, though they know disaster awaits them at the hands and clubs of the beach-combers, brave ignominious death to bury their eggs in the sandy shore. . . . So the policeman. All Nippon should not deter him from hatching the egg of thoroughness."

—From A THOUSAND LEAVES,
By Tamaka Hiero.

CHAPTER I

IN WHICH ARE INTRODUCED A THEATRE-AUDIENCE AND A CORPSE

THE dramatic season of 192— began in a disconcerting manner. Eugene O'Neill had neglected to write a new play in time to secure the financial encouragement of the *intelligentzia*; and as for the "low-brows," having attended play after play without enthusiasm, they had deserted the legitimate theatre for the more ingenuous delights of the motion picture palaces.

On the evening of Monday, September 24th, therefore, when a misty rain softened the electric blaze of Broadway's theatrical district, it was viewed morosely by house-managers and producers from 37th Street to Columbus Circle. Several plays were then and there given their walking-papers by the men higher up, who called upon God and the weather-bureau to witness their discomfiture. The penetrating rain kept the play-going public close to its radios and bridge-tables. Broadway was a bleak sight indeed to those few who had the temerity to patrol its empty streets.

The sidewalk fronting the Roman Theatre, on 47th Street west of the "White Way," however, was jammed with a mid-season, fair-weather crowd. The title "Gun-play" flared from a gay marquee. Cashiers dextrously attended the chattering throng lined up at the "To-night's Performance" window. The buff-and-blue doorman, impressive with the dignity of his uniform and the placidity of his years, bowed the evening's top-hatted and befurred

customers into the orchestra with an air of satisfaction, as if inclemencies of weather held no terrors for those implicated in "Gunplay's" production.

Inside the theatre, one of Broadway's newest, people hustled to their seats visibly apprehensive, since the boisterous quality of the play was public knowledge. In due time the last member of the audience ceased rustling his program; the last latecomer stumbled over his neighbor's feet; the lights dimmed and the curtain rose. A pistol coughed in the silence, a man screamed . . . the play was on.

"Gunplay" was the first drama of the season to utilize the noises customarily associated with the underworld. Automatics, machine guns, raids on night-clubs, the lethal sounds of gang vendettas—the entire stock-in-trade of the romanticized crime society was jammed into three swift acts. It was an exaggerated reflection of the times—a bit raw, a bit nasty and altogether satisfying to the theatrical public. Consequently it played to packed houses in rain and shine. This evening's house was proof of its popularity.

The performance proceeded smoothly. The audience was properly thrilled at the thunderous climax to the first act. The rain having stopped, people strolled out into the side alleys for a breath of air during the first ten-minute intermission. With the rising of the curtain on Act II, the detonations on the stage increased in volume. The second act hurtled to its big moment as explosive dialogue shot across the footlights. A slight commotion at the rear of the theatre went unnoticed, not unnaturally, in the noise and the darkness. No one seemed aware of anything amiss and the play crashed on. Gradually, however, the commotion increased in volume. At this point a few spectators at the rear of the left section squirmed about in their seats, to assert their rights in angry whispers. The

protest was contagious. In an incredibly short time scores of eyes turned toward that section of the orchestra.

Suddenly a sharp scream tore through the theatre. The audience, excited and fascinated by the swift sequence of events on the stage, craned their necks expectantly in the direction of the cry, eager to witness what they thought was a new sensation of the play.

Without warning the lights of the theatre snapped on, revealing puzzled, fearful, already appreciative faces. At the extreme left, near a closed exit-door, a large policeman stood holding a slight nervous man by the arm. He fended off a group of inquisitive people with a huge hand, shouting in stentorian tones, "Everybody stay right where he is! Don't move! Don't get out of your seat, any of you!"

People laughed.

The smiles were soon wiped away. For the audience began to perceive a curious hesitancy on the part of the actors. Although they continued to recite their lines behind the footlights they were casting puzzled glances out into the orchestra. People, noting this, half-rose from their seats, panicky in the presence of a scented tragedy. The officer's jovian voice continued to thunder, "Keep your seats, I say! Stay where you are!"

The audience suddenly realized that the incident was not play-acting but reality. Women shrieked and clutched their escorts. Bedlam broke loose in the balcony, whose occupants were in no position to see anything below.

The policeman turned savagely to a stocky, foreign-looking man in evening clothes who was standing by, rubbing his hands together.

"I'll have to ask you to close every exit this minute and see that they're kept closed, Mr. Panzer," he growled. "Station an usher at all the doors and tell 'em to hold everybody tryin' to get in or out. Send somebody outside

to cover the alleys, too, until help comes from the station. Move fast, Mr. Panzer, before hell pops!"

The swarthy little man hurried away, brushing aside a number of excited people who had disregarded the officer's bellowed admonition and had jumped up to question him.

The bluecoat stood wide-legged at the entrance to the last row of the left section, concealing with his bulk the crumpled figure of a man in full evening dress, lying slumped in a queer attitude on the floor between rows. The policeman looked up, keeping a firm grip on the arm of the cowering man at his side, and shot a quick glance toward the rear of the orchestra.

"Hey, Neilson!" he shouted.

A tall tow-headed man hurried out of a small room near the main entrance and pushed his way through to the officer. He looked sharply down at the inert figure on the floor.

"What's happened here, Doyle?"

"Better ask this feller here," replied the policeman grimly. He shook the arm of the man he was holding. "There's a guy dead, and Mr."—he bent a ferocious glance upon the shrinking little man—"Pusak, W-William Pusak," he stammered—"this Mr. Pusak," continued Doyle, "says he heard him whisper he'd been croaked."

Neilson stared at the dead body, stunned.

The policeman chewed his lip. "I'm in one sweet mess, Harry," he said hoarsely. "The only cop in the place, and a pack of yellin' fools to take care of. . . . I want you to do somethin' for me."

"Say the word. . . . This is one hell of a note!"

Doyle wheeled in a rage to shout to a man who had just risen three rows ahead and was standing on his seat, peering at the proceedings. "Hey you!" he roared. "Get down offa there! Here—get back there, the whole bunch

o' you. Back to your seats, now, or I'll pinch the whole nosey mob!"

He turned on Neilson. "Beat it to your desk, Harry, and give headquarters a buzz about the murder," he whispered. "Tell 'em to bring down a gang—make it a big one. Tell 'em it's a theatre—they'll know what to do. And here, Harry—take my whistle and toot your head off outside. I gotta get some help right away."

As Neilson fought his way back through the crowd, Doyle shouted after him: "Better ask 'em to send old man Queen down here, Harry!"

The tow-headed man disappeared into the office. A few moments later a shrill whistle was heard from the sidewalk in front of the theatre.

The swarthy theatre-manager whom Doyle had commanded to place guards at the exits and alleys came scurrying back through the press. His dress-shirt was slightly rumpled and he was mopping his forehead with an air of bewilderment. A woman stopped him as he wriggled his way forward. She squeaked,

"Why is this policeman keeping us here, Mr. Panzer? I've a right to leave, I should like you to know! I don't care if an accident *did* happen—I had nothing to do with it—that's your affair—please tell him to stop this silly disciplining of innocent people!"

The little man stammered, trying to escape. "Now, madam, please. I'm sure the officer knows what he is doing. A man has been killed here—it is a serious matter. Don't you see. . . . As manager of the theatre I must follow his orders. . . . Please be calm—have a little patience. . . ."

He wormed his way out of her grasp and was off before she could protest.

Doyle, his arms waving violently, stood on a seat and bellowed: "I told you to sit down and keep quiet, the pack

o' you! I don't care if you're the Mayor himself, you—yeah, you there, in the monocle—stay down or I'll shove you down! Don't you people realize what's happened? Pipe down, I say!" He jumped to the floor, muttering as he wiped the perspiration from his cap-band.

In the turmoil and excitement, with the orchestra boiling like a huge kettle, and necks stretched over the railing of the balcony as the people there strove vainly to discover the cause of the confusion, the abrupt cessation of activity on the stage was forgotten by the audience. The actors had stammered their way through lines rendered meaningless by the drama before the footlights. Now the slow descent of the curtain put an end to the evening's entertainment. The actors, chattering, hurried toward the stage-stairs. Like the audience they peered toward the nucleus of the trouble in bewilderment.

A buxom old lady, in garish clothes—the very fine imported actress billed in the character of Madame Murphy, "keeper of the public house"—her name was Hilda Orange; the slight, graceful figure of "the street waif, Nanette"—Eve Ellis, leading-lady of the piece; the tall robust hero of "Gunplay," James Peale, attired in a rough tweed suit and cap; the juvenile, smart in evening clothes, portraying the society lad who had fallen into the clutches of the "gang"—Stephen Barry; Lucille Horton, whose characterization of the "lady of the streets" had brought down a shower of adjectives from the dramatic critics, who had little enough to rant about that unfortunate season; a vandyked old man whose faultless evening clothes attested to the tailoring genius of M. Le Brun, costumer extraordinary to the entire cast of "Gunplay"; the heavy-set villain, whose stage-sowl was dissolved in a foggy docility as he surveyed the frantic auditorium; in fact, the entire personnel of the play, bewigged and powdered, rouged and painted—some wielding towels as they hastily removed their

make-up—scampered in a body under the lowering curtain and trooped down the stage-steps into the orchestra, where they elbowed their way up the aisle toward the scene of the commotion.

Another flurry, at the main entrance, caused many people despite Doyle's vigorous orders to rise in their seats for a clearer view. A group of bluecoats were hustling their way inside, their night-sticks ready. Doyle heaved a gargantuan sigh of relief as he saluted the tall man in plainclothes at their head.

"What's up, Doyle?" asked the newcomer, frowning at the pandemonium raging about them. The bluecoats who had entered with him were herding the crowd to the rear of the orchestra, behind the seat-sections. People who had been standing tried to slip back to their seats; they were apprehended and made to join the angry cluster jammed behind the last row.

"Looks like this man's been murdered, Sergeant," said Doyle.

"Uh-huh." The plainclothes man looked incuriously down at the one still figure in the theatre—lying at their feet, a black-sleeved arm flung over his face, his legs sprawled gawkily under the seats in the row before.

"What is it—gat?" asked the newcomer of Doyle, his eyes roving.

"No, sir—don't seem to be," said the policeman. "Had a doctor from the audience look him over the very first thing—thinks it's poison."

The Sergeant grunted. "Who's this?" he rapped, indicating the trembling figure of Pusak by Doyle's side.

"Chap who found the body," returned Doyle. "He hasn't moved from the spot since."

"Good enough." The detective turned toward a compact group huddled a few feet behind them and asked, generally: "Who's the manager here?"

Panzer stepped forward.

"I'm Velie, detective-sergeant from headquarters," said the plainclothes man abruptly. "Haven't you done anything to keep this yelling pack of idiots quiet?"

"I've done my best, Sergeant," mumbled the manager, wringing his hands. "But they all seem incensed at the way this officer"—he indicated Doyle apologetically—"has been storming at them. I don't know how I can reasonably expect them to keep sitting in their seats as if nothing had happened."

"Well, we'll take care of that," snapped Velie. He gave a rapid order to a uniformed man nearby. "Now"—he turned back to Doyle—"how about the doors, the exits? Done anything yet in that direction?"

"Sure thing, Sergeant," grinned the policeman. "I had Mr. Panzer here station ushers at every door. They've been there all night, anyway. But I just wanted to make sure."

"You were right. Nobody try to get out?"

"I think I can vouch for that, Sergeant," put in Panzer meekly. "The action of the play necessitates having ushers posted near every exit, for atmosphere. This is a crook-play, with a good deal of shooting and screaming and that sort of thing going on, and the presence of guards around the doors heightens the general effect of mystery. I can very easily find out for you if . . ."

"We'll attend to that ourselves," said Velie. "Doyle, who'd you send for?"

"Inspector Queen," answered Doyle. "I had the publicity man, Neilson, 'phone him at headquarters."

Velie allowed a smile to crease his wintry face. "Thought of everything, didn't you? Now how about the body? Has it been touched at all since this fellow found it?"

The cowering man held in Doyle's hard grasp broke out,

half-crying. "I—I only found him, officer—honest to God, I—"

"All right, all right," said Velie coldly. "You'll keep, won't you? What are you blubbering about? Well, Doyle?"

"Not a finger was laid on the body since I came over," replied Doyle, with a trace of pride in his voice. "Except, of course, for a Dr. Stuttgart. I got him out of the audience to make sure the man was dead. He was, and nobody else came near."

"You've been busy, haven't you, Doyle? I'll see you won't suffer by it," said Velie. He wheeled on Panzer, who shrank back. "Better trot up to the stage and make an announcement, Mr. Manager. The whole crew of 'em are to stay right where they are until Inspector Queen lets them go home—understand? Tell them it won't do any good to kick—and the more they kick the longer they'll be here. Make it plain, too, that they're to stick to their seats, and any suspicious move on anybody's part is going to make trouble."

"Yes. Yes. Good Lord, what a catastrophe!" groaned Panzer as he made his way down the aisle toward the stage.

At the same moment a little knot of people pushed open the big door at the rear of the theatre and stepped across the carpet in a body.

CHAPTER II

IN WHICH ONE QUEEN WORKS AND ANOTHER QUEEN WATCHES

THERE was nothing remarkable in either the physique or the manner of Inspector Richard Queen. He was a small, withered, rather mild-appearing old gentleman. He walked with a little stoop and an air of deliberation that somehow accorded perfectly with his thick grey hair and mustaches, veiled grey eyes and slender hands.

As he crossed the carpet with short, quick steps Inspector Queen was far from impressive to the milling eyes that observed his approach from every side. And yet, so unusual was the gentle dignity of his appearance, so harmless and benevolent the smile that illumined his lined old face, that an audible rustle swept over the auditorium, preceding him in a strangely fitting manner.

In his own men the change was appreciable. Doyle retreated into a corner near the left exits. Detective-Sergeant Velie, poised over the body—sardonic, cold, untouched by the near-hysteria about him—relaxed a trifle, as if he were satisfied to relinquish his place in the sun. The bluecoats guarding the aisles saluted with alacrity. The nervous, muttering, angry audience sank back with an unreasoning relief.

Inspector Queen stepped forward and shook hands with Velie.

"Too bad, Thomas, my boy. I hear you were going home when this happened," he murmured. To Doyle he smiled in a fatherly fashion. Then, in a mild pity, he peered down at the man on the floor. "Thomas," he asked, "are all the exits covered?" Velie nodded.

The old man turned back and let his eyes travel interestedly about the scene. He asked a low-voiced question of Velie, who nodded his head in assent; then he crooked his finger at Doyle.

"Doyle, where are the people who were sitting in these seats?" He pointed to three chairs adjoining the dead man's and four directly to the front of them in the preceding row.

The policeman appeared puzzled. "Didn't see anybody there, Inspector. . . ."

Queen stood silent for a moment, then waved Doyle back with the low remark to Velie, "In a crowded house, too. . . . Remember that." Velie raised his eyebrows gravely. "I'm cold on this whole business," continued the Inspector genially. "All I can see right now are a dead man and a lot of perspiring people making noise. Have Hesse and Piggott direct traffic for a while, eh, son?"

Velie spoke sharply to two of the plainclothes men who had entered the theatre with the Inspector. They wriggled their way toward the rear and the people who had been crowding around found themselves pushed aside. Policemen joined the two detectives. The group of actors and actresses were ordered to move back. A section was roped off behind the central tier of seats and some fifty men and women packed into the small space. Quiet men circulated among them, instructing them to show their tickets and return to their seats one by one. Within five minutes not a member of the audience was left standing. The actors were cautioned to remain within the roped enclosure for the time being.

In the extreme left aisle Inspector Queen reached into his topcoat pocket, carefully extracted a brown carved snuff-box and took a pinch with every evidence of enjoyment.

"That's more like it, Thomas," he chuckled. "You know how fussy I am about noises. . . . Who is the poor chap on the floor—do you know?"

Velie shook his head. "I haven't even touched the body, Inspector," he said. "I got here just a few minutes before you did. A man on the 47th Street beat called me up from his box and reported Doyle's whistle. Doyle seems to have been doing things, sir. . . . His lieutenant reports favorably on his record."

"Ah," said the Inspector, "ah, yes. Doyle. Come here, Doyle."

The policeman stepped forward and saluted.

"Just what," went on the little grey man, leaning comfortably against a seat-back, "just what happened here, Doyle?"

"All I know about it, Inspector," began Doyle, "is that a couple of minutes before the end of the second act this man"—he pointed to Pusak, who stood wretchedly in a corner—"came running up to me where I was standin' in the back, watchin' the show, and he says, 'A man's been murdered, officer! . . . A man's murdered!' He was blubberin' like a baby and I thought he was pie-eyed. But I stepped mighty quick and came over here—the place was dark and there was a lot of shootin' and screamin' on the stage—and I took a look at the feller on the floor. I didn't move him, but I felt his heart and there wasn't anything to feel. To make sure he was croaked I asked for a doctor and a gent by the name of Stuttgart answered my call. . . ."

Inspector Queen stood pertly, his head cocked on a side like a parrot's. "That's excellent," he said. "Excellent, Doyle. I'll question Dr. Stuttgart later. Then what happened?" he went on.

"Then," continued the policeman, "then I got the usherette on this aisle to beat it back to the manager's

office for Panzer. Louis Panzer—that's the manager right over there. . . ."

Queen regarded Panzer, who was standing a few feet to the rear talking to Neilson, and nodded. "That's Panzer, you say. All right, all right. . . . Ellery! You got my message?"

He darted forward, brushing aside Panzer, who fell back apologetically, and clapped the shoulder of a tall young man who had slipped through the main door and was slowly looking about the scene. The old man passed his arm through the younger man's.

"Haven't inconvenienced you any, son? What bookstore did you haunt to-night? Ellery, I'm mighty glad you're here!"

He dipped into his pocket, again extracted the snuff-box, sniffed deeply—so deeply that he sneezed—and looked up into his son's face.

"As a matter of fact," said Ellery Queen, his eyes restlessly roving, "I can't return the compliment. You just lured me away from a perfect book-lover's paradise. I was at the point of getting the dealer to let me have a priceless Falconer first-edition, intending to borrow the money from you at headquarters. I telephoned—and here I am. A Falconer— Oh, well. To-morrow will do, I suppose."

The Inspector chuckled. "Now if you told me you were picking up an old snuff-box I might be interested. As it is—trot along. Looks as if we have some work to-night."

They walked toward the little knot of men on the left, the old man's hand grasping his son's coat-sleeve. Ellery Queen towered six inches above his father's head. There was a square cut to his shoulders and an agreeable swing to his body as he walked. He was dressed in oxford grey and carried a light stick. On his nose perched what seemed

an incongruous note in so athletic a man—a rimless pince-nez. But the brow above, the long delicate lines of the face, the bright eyes were those of a man of thought rather than action.

They joined the group at the body. Ellery was greeted respectfully by Velie. He bent over the seat, glanced earnestly at the dead man, and stepped back.

"Go on, Doyle," said the Inspector briskly. "You looked at the body, detained the man who found it, got the manager. . . . Then what?"

"Panzer at my orders closed all the doors at once and saw that no one either came in or went out," answered Doyle. "There was a lot of fuss here with the audience, but nothing else happened."

"Right, right!" said the Inspector, feeling for his snuff-box. "You did a mighty good job. Now— That gentleman there."

He gestured in the direction of the trembling little man in the corner, who stepped forward hesitantly, licked his lips, looked about him with a helpless expression, and then stood silent.

"What's your name?" asked the Inspector, in a kindly tone.

"Pusak—William Pusak," said the man. "I'm a book-keeper, sir. I was just—"

"One at a time, Pusak. Where were you sitting?"

Pusak pointed eagerly to the sixth seat from the aisle, in the last row. A frightened young girl in the fifth seat sat staring in their direction.

"I see," said the Inspector. "Is that young lady with you?"

"Yes, sir—yes, sir. That's my fiancée, sir. Her name is Esther—Esther Jablow. . . ."

A little to the rear a detective was scribbling in a notebook. Ellery stood behind his father, glancing from one

exit to another. He began to draw a diagram on the fly-leaf of a small book he had taken from his topcoat pocket.

The Inspector scrutinized the girl, who immediately averted her eyes. "Now, Pusak, I want you to tell me just what happened."

"I—I didn't do a thing out of the way, sir."

Inspector Queen patted his arm. "Nobody is accusing you of anything, Pusak. All I want is your story of what happened. Take your time—tell it your own way. . . ."

Pusak gave him a curious glance. Then he moistened his lips and began. "Well, I was sitting there in that seat with my—with Miss Jablow—and we were enjoying the show pretty much. The second act was kind of exciting—there was a lot of shooting and yelling on the stage—and then I got up and started to go out the row to the aisle. This aisle—here." He pointed nervously to the spot of carpet on which he was standing. Queen nodded, his face benign.

"I had to push past my—Miss Jablow, and there wasn't anybody except one man between her and the aisle. That's why I went that way. I didn't sort of like to"—he hesitated apologetically—"to bother people going out that way in the middle of the most exciting part. . . ."

"That was very decent of you, Pusak," said the Inspector, smiling.

"Yes, sir. So I walked down the row, feeling my way, because it was pretty dark in the theatre, and then I came to—to this man." He shuddered, and continued more rapidly. "He was sitting in a funny way, I thought. His knees were touching the seat in front of him and I couldn't get past. I said, 'I'm sorry,' and tried again, but his knees hadn't moved an inch. I didn't know what to do, sir—I'm not nervy, like some fellows, and I was going to turn around and go back when all of a sudden I felt the man's body slip to the floor—I was still pressed up

close to him. Of course, I got kind of scared—it was only natural. . . .”

“I should say,” said the Inspector, with concern. “It must have given you quite a turn. Then what happened?”

“Well, sir. . . . Then, before I realized what was happening, he fell clean out of his seat and his head bumped against my legs. I didn’t know what to do. I couldn’t call for help—I don’t know why, but I couldn’t, somehow—and I just naturally bent over him, thinking he was drunk or sick or something, and meant to lift him up. I hadn’t figured on what I’d do after that. . . .”

“I know just how you felt, Pusak. Go on.”

“Then it happened—the thing I told this policeman about. I’d just got hold of his head when I felt his hand come up and grab mine, just like he was trying awfully hard to get a grip on something, and he moaned. It was so low I could hardly hear it, but—sort of horrible. I can’t quite describe it exactly. . . .”

“Now we’re getting on,” said the Inspector. “And?”

“And then he talked. It wasn’t really talking—it was more like a gurgle, as if he was choking. He said a few words that I didn’t catch at all, but I realized that this was something different from just being sick or drunk, so I bent even lower and listened hard. I heard him gasp, ‘It’s murder. . . . Been murdered . . .’ or something like that. . . .”

“So he said, ‘It’s murder,’ eh?” The Inspector regarded Pusak with severity. “Well, now. That must have given you a shock, Pusak.” He snapped suddenly, “Are you certain this man said ‘murder’?”

“That’s what I heard, sir. I’ve got good hearing,” said Pusak doggedly.

“Well!” Queen relaxed, smiling again. “Of course. I just wanted to make sure. Then what did you do?”

“Then I felt him squirm a little and all of a sudden

go limp in my arms. I was afraid he'd died and I don't know how—but next thing I knew I was in the back telling it all to the policeman—this policeman here.” He pointed to Doyle, who rocked on his heels impersonally.

“And that's all?”

“Yes, sir. Yes, sir. That's all I know about it,” said Pusak, with a sigh of relief.

Queen grasped him by the coat front and barked, “That isn't all, Pusak. You forgot to tell us why you left your seat in the first place!” He glared into the little man's eyes.

Pusak coughed, teetered back and forth a moment, as if uncertain of his next words, then leaned forward and whispered into the Inspector's astonished ear.

“Oh!” Queen's lips twitched in the suspicion of a smile, but he said gravely, “I see, Pusak. Thank you very much for your help. Everything is all right now—you may go back to your seat and leave with the others later on.” He waved his hand in a gesture of dismissal. Pusak, with a sickly glance at the dead man on the floor, crept around the rear wall of the last row and reappeared by the girl's side. She immediately engaged him in a whispered but animated conversation.

As the Inspector with a little smile turned to Velie, Ellery made a slight movement of impatience, opened his mouth to speak, appeared to reconsider, and finally moved quietly backwards, disappearing from view.

“Well, Thomas,” sighed the Inspector, “let's have a look at this chap.”

He bent nimbly over the dead man, on his knees in the space between the last row and the row directly before it. Despite the brilliant sparkle of light from the fixtures overhead, the cramped space near the floor was dark. Velie produced a flashlight and stooped over the Inspector, keeping its bright beam on the corpse, shifting it as the In-

spector's hands roved about. Queen silently pointed to an ugly ragged brown stain on the otherwise immaculate shirt-front.

"Blood?" grunted Velie.

The Inspector sniffed the shirt cautiously. "Nothing more dangerous than whisky," he retorted.

He ran his hands swiftly over the body, feeling over the heart and at the neck, where the collar was loosened. He looked up at Velie.

"Looks like a poisoning case, all right, Thomas. Get hold of this Dr. Stuttgart for me, will you? I'd like to have his professional opinion before Prouty gets here."

Velie snapped an order and a moment later a medium-sized man in evening clothes, olive-skinned and wearing a thin black mustache, came up behind a detective.

"Here he is, Inspector," said Velie.

"Ah, yes." Queen looked up from his examination. "How do you do, Doctor? I am informed that you examined the body almost immediately after it was discovered. I see no obvious sign of death—what is your opinion?"

"My examination was necessarily a cursory one," said Dr. Stuttgart carefully, his fingers brushing a phantom speck from his satin lapel. "In the semi-dark and under these conditions I could not at first discern any abnormal sign of death. From the constriction of the facial muscles I thought that it was a simple case of heart failure, but on closer examination I noticed that blueness of the face—it's quite clear in this light, isn't it? That combined with the alcoholic odor from the mouth seems to point to some form of alcoholic poisoning. Of one thing I can assure you—this man did not die of a gunshot wound or a stab. I naturally made sure of that at once. I even examined his neck—you see I loosened the collar—to make sure it was not strangulation."

"I see." The Inspector smiled. "Thank you very much, Doctor. Oh, by the way," he added, as Dr. Stuttgard with a muttered word turned aside, "do you think this man might have died from the effects of wood alcohol?"

Dr. Stuttgard answered promptly. "Impossible," he said. "It was something much more powerful and quick-acting."

"Could you put a name to the exact poison which killed this man?"

The olive-skinned physician hesitated. Then he said stiffly, "I am very sorry, Inspector; you cannot reasonably expect me to be more precise. Under the circumstances. . . ." His voice trailed off, and he backed away.

Queen chuckled as he bent again to his grim task.

The dead man sprawled on the floor was not a pleasant sight. The Inspector gently lifted the clenched hand and stared hard at the contorted face. Then he looked under the seat. There was nothing there. However, a black silk-lined cape hung carelessly over the back of the chair. He emptied all of the pockets of both dress-suit and cape, his hands diving in and out of the clothing. He extracted a few letters and papers from the inside breast pocket, delved into the vest pockets and trouser-pockets, heaping his discoveries in two piles—one containing papers and letters, the other coins, keys, and miscellaneous material. A silver flask initialed "M. F." he found in one of the hip-pockets. He handled the flask gingerly, holding it by the neck, and scanning the gleaming surface as if for fingerprints. Shaking his head, he wrapped the flask with infinite care in a clean handkerchief, and placed it aside.

A ticket stub colored blue and bearing the inscription "LL32 Left," he secreted in his own vest pocket.

Without pausing to examine any of the other objects individually, he ran his hands over the lining of the vest and coat, and made a rapid pass over the trouser-legs.

Then, as he fingered the coat-tail pocket, he exclaimed in a low tone, "Well, well, Thomas—here's a pretty find!" as he extracted a woman's evening bag, small, compact and glittering with rhinestones.

He turned it over in his hands reflectively, then snapped it open, glanced through it and took out a number of feminine accessories. In a small compartment, nestling beside a lipstick, he found a tiny card-case. After a moment, he replaced all the contents and put the bag in his own pocket.

The Inspector picked up the papers from the floor and swiftly glanced through them. He frowned as he came to the last one—a letterhead.

"Ever hear of Monte Field, Thomas?" he asked, looking up.

Velie tightened his lips. "I'll say I have. One of the crookedest lawyers in town."

The Inspector looked grave. "Well, Thomas, this is Mr. Monte Field—what's left of him." Velie grunted.

"Where the average police system falls down," came Ellery's voice over his father's shoulder, "is in its ruthless tracking down of gentlemen who dispose of such fungus as Mr. Monte Field."

The Inspector straightened, dusted his knees carefully, took a pinch of snuff, and said, "Ellery, my boy, you'll never make a policeman. I didn't know you knew Field."

"I wasn't exactly on terms of intimacy with the gentleman," said Ellery. "But I remember having met him at the Pantheon Club, and from what I heard at the time I don't wonder somebody has removed him from our midst."

"Let's discuss the demerits of Mr. Field at a more propitious time," said the Inspector gravely. "I happen to know quite a bit about him, and none of it is pleasant."

He wheeled and was about to walk away when Ellery,

gazing curiously at the dead body and the seat, drawled, "Has anything been removed, dad—anything at all?"

Inspector Queen turned his head. "And why do you ask that bright question, young man?"

"Because," returned Ellery, with a grimace, "unless my eyesight fails me, the chap's top hat is not under the seat, on the floor beside him, or anywhere in the general vicinity."

"So you noticed that too, did you, Ellery?" said the Inspector grimly. "It's the first thing I saw when I bent down to examine him—or rather the first thing I didn't see." The Inspector seemed to lose his geniality as he spoke. His brow wrinkled and his grey mustache bristled fiercely. He shrugged his shoulders. "And no hat-check in his clothes, either. . . . Flint!"

A husky young man in plain clothes hurried forward.

"Flint, suppose you exercise those young muscles of yours by getting down on your hands and knees and hunting for a top hat. It ought to be somewhere around here."

"Right, Inspector," said Flint cheerfully, and he began a methodical search of the indicated area.

"Velie," said Queen, in a businesslike tone, "suppose you find Ritter and Hesse and—no, those two will do—for me, will you?" Velie walked away.

"Hagstrom!" shouted the Inspector to another detective standing by.

"Yes, Chief."

"Get busy with this stuff"—he pointed to the two small piles of articles he had taken from Field's pockets and which lay on the floor—"and be sure to put them safely away in my own bags."

As Hagstrom knelt by the body, Ellery quietly bent over and opened the coat. He immediately jotted a memorandum on the fly-leaf of the book in which he had drawn a diagram some time before. He muttered to himself,

patting the volume, "And it's a Stendhauser private edition, too!"

Velie returned with Ritter and Hesse at his heels. The Inspector said sharply, "Ritter, go to this man's apartment. His name is Monte Field, he was an attorney, and he lived at 113 West 75th Street. Stick around until you're relieved. If any one shows up, nab him."

Ritter, touching his hat, mumbled, "Yes, Inspector," and turned away.

"Now, Hesse, my lad," continued the Inspector to the other detective, "hurry down to 51 Chambers Street, this man's office, and wait there until you hear from me. Get inside if you can, otherwise park outside the door all night."

"Right, Inspector." Hesse disappeared.

Queen turned about and chuckled as he saw Ellery, broad shoulders bent over, examining the dead man.

"Don't trust your father, eh, Ellery?" the Inspector chided. "What are you snooping for?"

Ellery smiled, straightening up. "I'm merely curious, that's all," he said. "There are certain things about this unsavory corpse that interest me hugely. For example, have you taken the man's head measurement?" He held up a piece of string, which he had slipped from a wrapped book in his coat pocket, and offered it for his father's inspection.

The Inspector took it, scowled and summoned a policeman from the rear of the theatre. He issued a low-voiced order, the string exchanged hands and the policeman departed.

"Inspector."

Queen looked up. Hagstrom stood by his elbow, eyes gleaming.

"I found this pushed way back under Field's seat when I picked up the papers. It was against the back wall."

He held up a dark-green bottle, of the kind used by

ginger-ale manufacturers. A gaudy label read, "Paley's Extra Dry Ginger Ale." The bottle was half-empty.

"Well, Hagstrom, you've got something up your sleeve. Out with it!" the Inspector said curtly.

"Yes, sir! When I found this bottle under the dead man's seat, I knew that he had probably used it to-night. There was no matinee to-day and the cleaning-women go over the place every twenty-four hours. It wouldn't have been there unless this man, or somebody connected with him, had used it and put it there to-night. I thought, 'Maybe this is a clue,' so I dug up the refreshment boy who had this section of the theatre and I asked him to sell me a bottle of ginger ale. He said"—Hagstrom smiled—"he said they don't sell ginger ale in this theatre!"

"You used your head that time, Hagstrom," said the Inspector approvingly. "Get hold of the boy and bring him here."

As Hagstrom left, a stout little man in slightly disarranged evening clothes hustled up, a policeman doggedly holding his arm. The Inspector sighed.

"Are you in charge of this affair, sir?" stormed the little man, drawing himself up to five feet two inches of perspiring flesh.

"I am," said Queen gravely.

"Then I want you to know," burst out the newcomer—"here, you, let go of my arm, do you hear?—I want you to know, sir . . ."

"Detach yourself from the gentleman's arm, officer," said the Inspector, with deepening gravity.

" . . . that I consider this entire affair the most vicious outrage! I have been sitting here with my wife and daughter since the interruption to the play for almost an hour, and your officers refuse to allow us even to stand up. It's a damnable outrage, sir! Do you think you can keep this entire audience waiting at your leisure? I've

been watching you—don't think I haven't. You've been dawdling around while we sat and suffered. I want you to know, sir—I want you to know!—that unless you permit my party to leave at once, I shall get in touch with my very good friend District Attorney Sampson and lodge a personal complaint against you!"

Inspector Queen gazed distastefully into the empurpled face of the stout little man. He sighed and said with a note of sternness, "My dear man, has it occurred to you that at this moment, while you stand beefing about a little thing like being detained an hour or so, a person who has committed murder may be in this very audience—perhaps sitting next to your wife and daughter? He is just as anxious as you are to get away. If you wish to make a complaint to the District Attorney, your very good friend, you may do so after you leave this theatre. Meanwhile, I'll trouble you to return to your seat and be patient until you are permitted to go. . . . I hope I make myself clear."

A titter arose from some spectators nearby, who seemed to be enjoying the little man's discomfiture. He flounced away, with the policeman stolidly following. The Inspector, muttering, "Jackass!" turned to Velie.

"Take Panzer with you to the box-office and see if you can find complete tickets for these numbers." He bent over the last row and the row before it, scribbling the numbers LL30 Left, LL28 Left, LL26 Left, KK32 Left, KK30 Left, KK28 Left, and KK26 Left on the back of an old envelope. He handed the memorandum to Velie, who went away.

Ellery, who had been leaning idly against the rear wall of the last row, watching his father, the audience, and occasionally restudying the geography of the theatre, murmured in the Inspector's ear: "I was just reflecting on the unusual fact that with such a popular bit of dramatic trash as 'Gunplay,' seven seats in the direct vicinity of

the murdered man's seat should remain empty during the performance."

"When did you begin to wonder, my son?" said Queen, and while Ellery absently tapped the floor with his stick, barked, "Piggott!"

The detective stepped forward.

"Get the usherette who was on this aisle and the outside doorman—that middle-aged fellow on the sidewalk—and bring 'em here."

As Piggott walked off, a disheveled young man appeared by Queen's side, wiping his face with a handkerchief.

"Well, Flint?" asked Queen instantly.

"I've been over this floor like a scrub-woman, Inspector. If you're looking for a hat in this section of the theatre, it's mighty well hidden."

"All right, Flint, stand by."

The detective trudged off. Ellery said slowly, "Didn't really think your young Diogenes would find the tophat, did you, dad?"

The Inspector grunted. He walked down the aisle and proceeded to lean over person after person, questioning each in low tones. All heads turned in his direction as he went from row to row, interrogating the occupants of the two aisle-seats successively. As he walked back in Ellery's direction, his face expressionless, the policeman whom he had sent out with the piece of string, saluted him.

"What size, officer?" asked the Inspector.

"The clerk in the hat store said it was exactly $7\frac{1}{8}$," answered the bluecoat. Inspector Queen nodded, dismissing him.

Velie strode up, with Panzer trailing worriedly behind. Ellery leaned forward with an air of keen absorption to catch Velie's words. Queen grew tense, the light of a great interest on his face.

"Well, Thomas," he said, "what did you find in the box-office?"

"Just this, Inspector," reported Velie unemotionally. "The seven tickets for which you gave me the numbers are not in the ticket-rack. They were sold from the box-office window, at what date Mr. Panzer has no way of knowing."

"The tickets might have been turned over to an agency, you know, Velie," remarked Ellery.

"I verified that, Mr. Queen," answered Velie. "Those tickets were not assigned to any agency. There are definite records to prove it."

Inspector Queen stood very still, his grey eyes gleaming. Then he said, "In other words, gentlemen, it would seem that at a drama which has been playing to capacity business ever since its opening, seven tickets in a group were bought—and then the purchasers conveniently forgot to attend the performance!"

CHAPTER III

IN WHICH A "PARSON" COMES TO GRIEF

THERE was a silence as the four men regarded each other with a dawning conviction. Panzer shuffled his feet and coughed nervously; Velie's face was a study in concentrated thought; Ellery stepped backward and fell into a rapt contemplation of his father's grey-and-blue necktie.

Inspector Queen stood biting his mustache. He shook his shoulders suddenly and turned on Velie.

"Thomas, I'm going to give you a dirty job," he said. "I want you to marshal a half-dozen or so of the uniformed men and set 'em to a personal examination of every soul in this place. All they have to do is get the name and address of each person in the audience. It's quite a job, and it will take time, but I'm afraid it's absolutely necessary. By the way, Thomas, in your scouting around, did you question any of the ushers who take care of the balcony?"

"I got hold of the very man to give me information," said Velie. "He's the lad who stands at the foot of the stairs in the orchestra, directing holders of balcony tickets to the upper floor. Chap by the name of Miller."

"A very conscientious boy," interposed Panzer, rubbing his hands.

"Miller is ready to swear that not a person in this theatre either went upstairs from the orchestra or came downstairs from the balcony from the moment the curtain went up on the second act."

"That sort of cuts down your work, Thomas," remarked the Inspector, who had been listening intently.

"Have your men go through the orchestra-boxes and orchestra only. Remember—I want the name and address of every person here—every single one. And Thomas—"

"Yes, Inspector?" said Velie, turning back.

"While they're at it, have 'em ask these people to show the ticket-stubs belonging to the seats in which they are sitting. Every case of loss of stub should be noted beside the name of the loser; and in cases—it is a bare possibility—where a person holds a stub which does not agree with the seat-number of the chair in which he's sitting, a notation is also to be made. Think you can get all that done, my boy?"

"Sure thing!" Velie grunted as he strode away.

The Inspector smoothed his grey mustache and took a pinch of snuff, inhaling deeply.

"Ellery," he said, "there's something worrying you. Out with it, son!"

"Eh?" Ellery started, blinking his eyes. He removed his pince-nez, and said slowly, "My very revered father, I am beginning to think that— Well! There's little peace in this world for a quiet book-loving man." He sat down on the arm of the dead man's seat, his eyes troubled. Suddenly he smiled. "Take care that you don't repeat the unfortunate error of that ancient butcher who, with his twoscore apprentices, sought high and low for his most treasured knife when all the time it reposed quietly in his mouth."

"You're very informative these days, my son," said the Inspector petulantly. "Flint!"

The detective came forward.

"Flint," said Queen, "you've had one pleasant job to-night and I've another for you. Think your back could stand a little more bending? Seems to me I remember you took a weight-lifting contest in the Police Games when you were pounding a beat."

"Yes, sir," said Flint, grinning broadly. "I guess I can stand the strain."

"Well, then," continued the Inspector, jamming his hands into his pockets, "here's your job. Get a squad of men together—good Lord, I should have brought the Reserves along with me!—and make an exhaustive search of every square foot of the theatre-property, inside and out. You'll be looking for ticket-stubs, do you understand? Anything resembling half a ticket has to be in my possession when you're through. Search the theatre-floor particularly, but don't neglect the rear, the steps leading up to the balcony, the lobby outside, the sidewalk in front of the theatre, the alleyways at both sides, the lounge downstairs, the men's room, the ladies' room— Here, here! That'll never do. Call up the nearest precinct for a matron and have her do that. Thoroughly clear?"

Flint was off with a cheerful nod.

"Now, then." Queen stood rubbing his hands. "Mr. Panzer, would you step this way a minute? Very kind of you, sir. I'm afraid we're making unholy nuisances of ourselves to-night, but it can't be helped. I see the audience is on the verge of rebellion. I'd be obliged if you would trot up to the stage and announce that they will be held here just a little while longer, to have patience, and all that sort of thing. Thank you!"

As Panzer hurried down the center aisle, people clutching at his coat to detain him, Detective Hagstrom, standing a few feet away, caught the Inspector's eye. By his side was a small slim youth of nineteen, chewing gum with vehement motions of his jaw, and obviously quite nervous at the ordeal he was facing. He was clad in a black-and-gold uniform, very ornate and resplendent, and incongruously fitted out with a starched shirt-front and a wing collar and bow tie. A cap resembling the headgear of a

bell-boy perched on his blonde head. He coughed deprecatingly as the Inspector motioned him forward.

"Here is the boy who says they don't sell ginger ale in this theatre," said Hagstrom severely, grasping the lad's arm in a suggestive grip.

"You don't, eh, son?" asked Queen affably. "How is that?"

The boy was plainly in a funk. His eyes rolled alarmingly as they sought the broad face of Doyle. The policeman patted him encouragingly on the shoulder and said to the Inspector, "He's a little scared, sir—but he's a good boy. I've known him since he was a shaver. Grew up on my beat.—Answer the Inspector, Jessie. . . ."

"Well, I—I don't know, sir," stammered the boy, shuffling his feet. "The only drinks we're allowed to sell during the intermissions is orangeade. We got a contract with the ——"—he mentioned the name of a well-known manufacturer of the concoction—"people and they give us a big discount if we sell their stuff and nobody else's. So—"

"I see," said the Inspector. "Are drinks sold only during intermissions?"

"Yes, sir," answered the boy, more naturally. "As soon as the curtain goes down the doors to the alleys on both sides are opened, and there we are—my partner and me, with our stands set up, and the cups filled ready to serve."

"Oh, so there are two of you, eh?"

"No, sir, three all together. I forgot to tell you—one feller is downstairs in the main lounge, too."

"Ummmm." The Inspector fixed him with a large and kindly eye. "Now, son, if the Roman Theatre sells nothing but orangeade, do you think you could explain how this ginger-ale bottle got here?"

His hand dove down and reappeared brandishing the

dark-green bottle discovered by Hagstrom. The boy paled and began to bite his lips. His eyes roved from side to side as if they sought a quick avenue of escape. He inserted a large and dirty finger between his neck and collar and coughed.

"Why—why . . ." He had some difficulty in speaking.

Inspector Queen put down the bottle and rested his wiry length against the arm of a seat. He folded his arms sternly.

"What's your name?" he demanded.

The boy's color changed from blue-white to a pasty yellow. He furtively eyed Hagstrom, who had with a flourish taken a notebook and pencil from his pocket and was waiting forbiddingly.

The boy moistened his lips. "Lynch—Jess Lynch," he said hoarsely.

"And where is your station between acts, Lynch?" said the Inspector balefully.

"I'm—I'm right here, in the left-side alley, sir," stutered the boy.

"Ah!" said the Inspector, knitting his brows ferociously. "And were you selling drinks in the left alley to-night, Lynch?"

"Why, why—yes, sir."

"Then you know something about this ginger-ale bottle?"

The boy peered about, saw the stout small form of Louis Panzer on the stage, about to make an announcement, and leaning forward, whispered, "Yes, sir—I do know about that bottle. I—I didn't want to tell before because Mr. Panzer's a strict guy when it comes to breaking rules, and he'd fire me in a minute if he knew what I did. You won't tell, sir?"

The Inspector started, then smiled. "Shoot, son. You've

got something on your conscience—might as well get it off.” He relaxed and at a flick of a finger Hagstrom unconcernedly walked away.

“This is how it happened, sir,” began Jess Lynch eagerly. “I’d set my stand up in the alley here about five minutes before the end of the first act, like we’re supposed to. When the girl on this aisle opened the doors after the first act, I began to give the people comin’ out a nice refined selling chatter. We all do. A lot of people bought drinks, and I was so busy I didn’t have time to notice anything going on around me. In a little while I had a breathing spell, and then a man came up to me and said, ‘Let me have a bottle of ginger ale, boy.’ I looked up and saw he was a ritzy feller in evening dress, actin’ kind of tipsy. He was laughing to himself and he looked pretty happy. I says to myself, ‘I bet I know what *he* wants ginger ale for!’ and sure enough he taps his back pocket and winks. Well—”

“Just a minute, son,” interrupted Queen. “Ever see a dead man before?”

“Why—why, no sir, but I guess I could stand it once,” said the boy nervously.

“Fine! Is this the man who asked you for the ginger ale?” The Inspector took the boy by the arm and made him bend over the dead body.

Jess Lynch regarded it with awed fascination. He bobbed his head vigorously.

“Yes, sir. That’s the gentleman.”

“You’re sure of that now, Jess?” The boy nodded. “By the way, is that the outfit he was wearing when he accosted you?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Anything missing, Jess?” Ellery, who had been nestling in a dark corner, leaned forward a little.

The boy regarded the Inspector with puzzlement on his

face, looking from Queen to the body and back again. He was silent for a full minute, while the Queens hung on his words. Then his face lit up suddenly and he cried, "Why—yes, sir! He was wearin' a hat—a shiny topper—when he spoke to me!"

Inspector Queen looked pleased. "Go on, Jess—Doc Prouty! It's taken you a whale of a long time getting here. What held you up?"

A tall lanky man had come striding across the carpet, a black bag in his hand. He was smoking a vicious-looking cigar with no apparent concern for local fire rules, and appeared in something of a hurry.

"You said something there, Inspector," he said, setting down the bag and shaking hands with both Ellery and Queen. "You know we just moved and I haven't got my new phone yet. I had a hard day to-day and I was in bed anyway. They couldn't get hold of me—had to send a man around to my new place. I rushed down here as fast as I could. Where's the casualty?"

He dropped to his knees in the aisle as the Inspector indicated the body on the floor. A policeman was summoned to hold a flashlight as the Assistant Medical Examiner worked.

Queen took Jess Lynch by the arm and walked him off to one side. "What happened after he asked you for the ginger ale, Jess?"

The boy, who had been staring at the proceedings, gulped and continued. "Well, sir, of course I told him that we didn't sell ginger ale, only orangeade. He leaned a little closer, and then I could smell the booze on his breath. He says confidentially, 'There's a half a dollar in it for you if you get me a bottle, kid! But I want it right away!' Well—you know how it is—they don't give tips nowadays. . . . Anyway, I said I couldn't get it that minute but that I'd duck out and buy a bottle for him right after

the second act started. He walked away—after tellin' me where he was sitting—I saw him go back into the theatre. As soon as the intermission ended and the usherette closed the doors, I left my stand in the alleyway and hopped across the street to Libby's ice-cream parlor. I—"

"Do you usually leave your stand in the alley, Jess?"

"No, sir. I always hop inside the doors with the stand just before she locks the doors, and then take it downstairs to the lounge. But the man said he wanted the ginger ale right away, so I figured I'd save time by getting the bottle for him first. Then I thought I'd go back into the alley, get my stand, and bring it into the theatre through the front door. Nobody'd say anything. . . . Anyway, I left the stand in the alley and ran over to Libby's. I bought a bottle of Paley's ginger ale, sneaked it inside to this man, and he gave me a buck. Pretty nice of him, I thought, seeing as how he'd only promised me four bits."

"You told that very nicely, Jess," said the Inspector with approval. "Now, a few things more. Was he sitting in this seat—was this the seat he told you to come to?"

"Oh, yes, sir. He said LL32 Left, and sure enough that's where I found him."

"Quite right." The Inspector, after a pause, asked casually, "Did you notice if he was alone, Jess?"

"Sure thing, sir," returned the boy in a cheerful tone. "He was sittin' all alone on this end seat. The reason I noticed it was that the show's been packed ever since it opened, and I thought it was queer that there should be so many seats empty around here."

"That's fine, Jess. You'll make a detective yet. . . . You couldn't tell me how many seats were empty, I suppose?"

"Well, sir, it was kind of dark and I wasn't payin' much attention. I guess it was about half a dozen, all told—

some next to him in the same row and some right in the row in front."

"Just a moment, Jess." The boy turned, licking his lips in honest fright at the sound of Ellery's low cool voice. "Did you see anything more of that shiny topper when you handed him the bottle of ginger ale?" asked Ellery, tapping the point of his neat shoe with his stick.

"Why, yes—yes, sir!" stammered the boy. "When I gave him the bottle he was holding the hat in his lap, but before I left I saw him stick it underneath his seat."

"Another question, Jess." The boy sighed with relief at the sound of the Inspector's reassuring voice. "About how long, do you reckon, did it take you to deliver the bottle to this man after the second act started?"

Jess Lynch thought gravely for a moment, and then said with finality, "It was just about ten minutes, sir. We got to keep pretty close tabs on the time, and I know it was ten minutes because when I came into the theatre with the bottle it was just the part on the stage when the girl is caught in the gang's hang-out and is being grilled by the villain."

"An observant young Hermes!" murmured Ellery, smiling suddenly. The orangeade boy caught the smile and lost the last vestige of his fear. He smiled back. Ellery crooked his finger and bent forward. "Tell me, Jess. Why did it take you ten minutes to cross the street, buy a bottle of ginger ale and return to the theatre? Ten minutes is a long time, isn't it?"

The boy turned scarlet as he looked appealingly from Ellery to the Inspector. "Well, sir—I guess I stopped to talk for a few minutes with my girl. . . ."

"Your girl?" The Inspector's voice was mildly curious.

"Yes, sir. Elinor Libby—her old man owns the ice-cream parlor. She—she wanted me to stay there in the store with her when I went for the ginger ale. I told her

I had to deliver it in the theatre, so she said all right but wouldn't I come right back. And I did. We stayed there a couple of minutes and then I remembered the stand in the alley. . . ."

"The stand in the alley?" Ellery's tone was eager. "Quite so, Jess—the stand in the alley. Don't tell me that, by some remarkable whim of fortune, you went back to the alley!"

"Sure I did!" rejoined the boy, in surprise. "I mean—we both did, Elinor and me."

"Elinor and you, eh, Jess?" said Ellery softly. "And how long were you there?"

The Inspector's eyes flashed at Ellery's question. He muttered approvingly to himself and listened intently as the boy answered.

"Well, I wanted to take the stand right away, sir, but Elinor and me—we got to talking there—and Elinor said why not stay in the alley till the next intermission. . . . I figured that was a good idea. I'd wait till a few minutes before 10:05, when the act ends, and I'd duck down for some more orangeade, and then when the doors opened for the second intermission I'd be all ready. So we stayed there, sir. . . . It wasn't wrong, sir. I didn't mean anything wrong."

Ellery straightened and fixed the boy with his eyes. "Jess, I want you to be very careful now. At exactly what time did you and your Elinor get to the alley?"

"Well. . . ." Jess scratched his head. "It was about 9:25 when I gave that man the ginger ale. I went across for Elinor, stayed a few minutes and then came over to the alley. Musta been just about 9:35—just about—when I went back for my orangeade stand."

"Very good. And what time exactly did you leave the alley?"

"It was just ten o'clock, sir. Elinor looked at her wrist-

watch when I asked her if it was time to go in for my orangeade refills."

"You didn't hear anything going on in the theatre?"

"No, sir. We were too busy talking, I guess. . . . I didn't know anything had happened inside until we walked out of the alley and I met Johnny Chase, one of the ushers, standing there, like he was on guard. He told me there was an accident inside and Mr. Panzer had sent him to stand outside the left alley."

"I see. . . ." Ellery removed his pince-nez in some agitation and flourished it before the boy's nose. "Carefully now, Jess. Did anyone go in or out of the alley all the time you were there with Elinor?"

The boy's answer was immediate and emphatic. "No, sir. Not a soul."

"Right, my lad." The Inspector gave the boy a spanking slap on the back and sent him off grinning. Queen looked around sharply, spied Panzer, who had made his announcement on the stage with ineffectual results, and beckoned with an imperative finger.

"Mr. Panzer," he said abruptly, "I want some information about the time-schedule of the play. . . . At what time does the curtain go up on the second act?"

"The second act begins at 9:15 sharp and ends at 10:05 sharp," said Panzer instantly.

"Was to-night's performance run according to this schedule?"

"Certainly. We must be on the dot because of cues, lights, and so on," responded the manager.

The Inspector muttered some calculations to himself. "That makes it 9:25, the boy saw Field alive," he mused. "He was found dead at . . ."

He swung about and called for Officer Doyle. The man came running.

"Doyle," asked the Inspector, "Doyle, do you remember

exactly at what time this fellow Pusak approached you with his story of the murder?"

The policeman scratched his head. "Why, I don't remember exactly, Inspector," he said. "All I do know is that the second act was almost over when it happened."

"Not definite enough, Doyle," said Queen irritably. "Where are the actors now?"

"Got 'em herded right over there back of the center section, sir," said Doyle. "We didn't know what to do with 'em except that."

"Get one of them for me!" snapped the Inspector.

Doyle ran off. Queen beckoned to Detective Piggott, who was standing a few feet to the rear between a man and a woman.

"Got the doorman there, Piggott?" asked Queen. Piggott nodded and a tall, corpulent old man, cap trembling in his hand, uniform shrunken on his flabby body, stumbled forward.

"Are you the man who stands outside the theatre—the regular doorman?" asked the Inspector.

"Yes, sir," the doorman answered, twisting the cap in his hands.

"Very well. Now think hard. Did anyone—anyone, mind you—leave the theatre by the front entrance during the second act?" The Inspector was leaning forward, like a small greyhound.

The man took a moment before replying. Then he said slowly, but with conviction, "No, sir. Nobody went out of the theatre. Nobody, I mean, but the orangeade boy."

"Were you there all the time?" barked the Inspector.

"Yes, sir."

"Now then. Do you remember anybody *coming in* during the second act?"

"We-e-ll. . . . Jessie Lynch, the orangeade boy, came in right after the act started."

"Anybody else?"

There was silence as the old man made a frenzied effort at concentration. After a moment he looked helplessly from one face to another, eyes despairing. Then he mumbled, "I don't remember, sir."

The Inspector regarded him irritably. The old man seemed sincere in his nervous way. He was perspiring and frequently looked sidewise at Panzer, as if he sensed that his defection of memory would cost him his position.

"I'm awfully sorry, sir," the doorman repeated. "Awfully sorry. There might've been some one, but my memory ain't as good as it used to be when I was younger. I—I just can't seem to recall."

Ellery's cool voice cut in on the old man's thick accents.

"How long have you been a doorman?"

The old man's bewildered eyes shifted to this new inquisitor. "Nigh onto ten years, sir. I wasn't always a doorman. Only when I got old and couldn't do nothin' else—"

"I understand," said Ellery kindly. He hesitated a moment, then added inflexibly, "A man who has been a doorman for as many years as you have might forget something about the first act. But people do not often come into a theatre during the second act. Surely if you think hard enough you can answer positively, one way or the other?"

The response came painfully. "I—I don't remember, sir. I could say no one did, but that mightn't be the truth. I just can't answer."

"All right." The Inspector put his hand on the old man's shoulder. "Forget it. Perhaps we're asking too much. That's all for the time being." The doorman shuffled away with the pitiful alacrity of old age.

Doyle clumped toward the group, a tall handsome man dressed in rough tweeds in his wake, traces of stage make-up streaking his face.

"This is Mr. Peale, Inspector. He's the leading man of the show," reported Doyle.

Queen smiled at the actor, offering his hand. "Pleased to make your acquaintance, Mr. Peale. Perhaps you can help us out with a little information."

"Glad to be of service, Inspector," replied Peale, in a rich baritone. He glanced at the back of the Medical Examiner, who was busy over the dead man; then looked away with repugnance.

"I suppose you were on the stage at the time the hue-and-cry went up in this unfortunate affair?" pursued the Inspector.

"Oh, yes. In fact, the entire cast was. What is it you would like to know?"

"Could you definitely place the time that you noticed something wrong in the audience?"

"Yes, I can. We had just about ten minutes before the end of the act. It was at the climax of the play, and my rôle demands the discharge of a pistol. I remember we had some discussion during rehearsals of this point in the play, and that is how I can be so sure of the time."

The Inspector nodded. "Thank you very much, Mr. Peale. That's exactly what I wanted to know. . . . Incidentally, let me apologize for having kept you people crowded back here in this fashion. We were quite busy and had no time to make other arrangements. You and the rest of the cast are at liberty to go backstage now. Of course, make no effort to leave the theatre until you are notified."

"I understand completely, Inspector. Happy to have been able to help." Peale bowed and retreated to the rear of the theatre.

The Inspector leaned against the nearest seat, absorbed in thought. Ellery, at his side, was absently polishing the

lenses of his pince-nez. Father motioned significantly to son.

"Well, Ellery?" Queen asked in a low voice.

"Elementary, my dear Watson," murmured Ellery. "Our respected victim was last seen alive at 9:25, and he was found dead at approximately 9:55. Problem: What happened between times? Sounds ludicrously simple."

"You don't say?" muttered Queen. "Piggott!"

"Yes, sir."

"Is that the usherette? Let's get some action."

Piggott released the arm of the young woman standing at his side. She was a pert and painted lady with even white teeth and a ghastly smile. She minced forward and regarded the Inspector brazenly.

"Are you the regular usherette on this aisle, Miss—?" asked the Inspector briskly.

"O'Connell, Madge O'Connell. Yes, I am!"

The Inspector took her arm gently. "I'm afraid I'll have to ask you to be as brave as you are impertinent, my dear," he said. "Step over here for a moment." The girl's face was deathly white as they paused at the LL row. "Pardon me a moment, Doc. Mind if we interrupt your work?"

Dr. Prouty looked up with an abstracted scowl. "No, go right ahead, Inspector. I'm nearly through." He stood up and moved aside, biting the cigar between his teeth.

Queen watched the girl's face as she stooped over the dead man's body. She drew her breath in sharply.

"Do you remember ushering this man to his seat to-night, Miss O'Connell?"

The girl hesitated. "Seems like I do. But I was very busy to-night, as usual, and I must have ushered two hundred people all told. So I couldn't say positively."

"Do you recall whether these seats which are empty

now"—he indicated the seven vacant chairs—"were unoccupied all during the first and second acts?"

"Well. . . . I do seem to remember noticing them that way as I walked up and down the aisle. . . . No, sir. I don't think anybody sat in those seats all night."

"Did anyone walk up or down this aisle during the second act, Miss O'Connell? Think hard, now; it's important that you answer correctly."

The girl hesitated once more, flashing bold eyes at the impassive face of the Inspector. "No—I didn't see anybody walk up or down the aisle." She quickly added, "I couldn't tell you much. I don't know a thing about this business. I'm a hard-working girl, and I—"

"Yes, yes, my dear, we understand that. Now—where do you generally stand when you're not ushering people to their seats?"

The girl pointed to the head of the aisle.

"Were you there all during the second act, Miss O'Connell?" asked the Inspector softly.

The girl moistened her lips before she spoke. "Well—yes, I was. But, honest, I didn't see anything out of the way all night."

"Very well." Queen's voice was mild. "That's all." She turned away with quick, light steps.

There was a stir behind the group. Queen wheeled to confront Dr. Prouty, who had risen to his feet and was closing his bag. He was whistling dolefully.

"Well, Doc—I see you're through. What's the verdict?" asked Queen.

"It's short and snappy, Inspector. Man died about two hours ago. Cause of death puzzled me for a while but it's pretty well settled in my mind as poison. The signs all point to some form of alcoholic poisoning—you've probably noticed the sallow blue color of the skin. Did you smell his breath? Sweetest odor of bum booze I ever

had the pleasure of inhaling. He must have been drunk as a lord. At the same time, it couldn't have been ordinary alcoholic poisoning—he wouldn't have dropped off so fast. That's all I can tell you right now." He paused, buttoning his coat.

Queen took Field's kerchief-wrapped flask from his pocket and handed it to Dr. Prouty. "This is the dead man's flask, Doc. Suppose you analyze the contents for me. Before you handle it, though, let Jimmy down at the laboratory look it over for fingerprints. And—but wait a minute." The Inspector peered about and picked up the half-empty ginger-ale bottle where it stood in a corner on the carpet. "You can analyze this ginger ale for me, too, Doc," he added.

The Assistant Medical Examiner, after stowing the flask and bottle into his bag, tenderly adjusted the hat on his head.

"Well, I'll be going, Inspector," he drawled. "I'll have a fuller report for you when I've performed the autopsy. Ought to give you something to work on. Incidentally, the morgue-wagon must be outside—I 'phoned for one on my way down. So long." He yawned and slouched away.

As Dr. Prouty disappeared, two white-garbed orderlies hurried across the carpet, bearing a stretcher between them. At a sign from Queen they lifted the inert body, deposited it on the stretcher, covered it with a blanket and hustled out. The detectives and policemen around the door watched with relief as the grisly burden was borne away—the main work of the evening for them was almost over. The audience—rustling, whispering, shifting, coughing, murmuring—twisted about with a renewal of interest as the body was unceremoniously carted off.

Queen had just turned to Ellery with a weary sigh when from the extreme right-hand side of the theatre came an ominous commotion. People everywhere popped out of

their seats, staring, while policemen shouted for quiet. Queen spoke rapidly to a uniformed officer nearby. Ellery slipped to one side, eyes gleaming. The disturbance came nearer by jerky degrees. Two policemen appeared hauling a struggling figure between them. They dragged their capture to the head of the left aisle and hustled the man to his feet, holding him up by main force.

The man was short and ratlike. He wore cheap store-clothes of a sombre cut. On his head was a black hat of the kind sometimes worn by country dominies. His mouth writhed in an ugly manner; imprecations issued from it venomously. As he caught the eye of the Inspector fixed upon him, however, he ceased struggling and went limp at once.

"Found this man tryin' to sneak out the alley door on the other side of the buildin', Inspector," panted one of the bluecoats, shaking the captive roughly.

The Inspector chuckled, took his brown snuff-box from his pocket, inhaled, sneezed his habitual joyful sneeze, and beamed upon the silent cowering man between the two officers.

"Well, well, Parson," he said genially. "Mighty nice of you to turn up so conveniently!"

CHAPTER IV

IN WHICH MANY ARE CALLED AND TWO ARE CHOSEN

SOME natures, through peculiar weakness, cannot endure the sight of a whining man. Of all the silent, threatening group ringed about the abject figure called "Parson," Ellery alone experienced a sick feeling of disgust at the spectacle the prisoner was making of himself.

At the hidden lash in Queen's words, the Parson drew himself up stiffly, glared into the Inspector's eyes for a split second, then with a resumption of his former tactics began to fight against the sturdy arms which encircled him. He writhed and spat and cursed, finally becoming silent again. He was conserving his breath. The fury of his threshing body communicated itself to his captors; another policeman joined the *mêlée* and helped pin the prisoner to the floor. And suddenly he wilted and shrank like a pricked balloon. A policeman hauled him roughly to his feet, where he stood, eyes downcast, body still, hat clutched in his hand.

Ellery turned his head.

"Come now, Parson," went on the Inspector, just as if the man had been a balky child at rest after a fit of temper, "you know that sort of business doesn't go with me. What happened when you tried it last time at the Old Slip on the riverfront?"

"Answer when you're spoken to!" growled a bluecoat, prodding him in the ribs.

"I don't know nothin' and besides I got nothin' to say," muttered the Parson, shifting from one foot to the other.

"I'm surprised at you, Parson," said Queen gently. "I haven't asked you what you know."

"You got no right to hold an innocent man!" shouted the Parson indignantly. "Ain't I as good as anybody else here? I bought a ticket and I paid for it with real dough, too! Where do you get that stuff—tryin' to keep me from goin' home!"

"So you bought a ticket, did you?" asked the Inspector, rocking on his heels. "Well, well! Suppose you snap out the old stub and let Papa Queen look it over."

The Parson's hand mechanically went to his lower vest pocket, his fingers dipping into it with a quite surprising deftness. His face went blank as he slowly withdrew his hand, empty. He began a search of his other pockets with an appearance of fierce annoyance that made the Inspector smile.

"Hell!" grunted the Parson. "If that ain't the toughest luck. I always hangs onto my ticket-stubs, an' just to-night I have to go and throw it away. Sorry, Inspector!"

"Oh, that's quite all right," said Queen. His face went bleak and hard. "Quit stalling, Cazzanelli! What were you doing in this theatre to-night? What made you decide to duck out so suddenly? Answer me!"

The Parson looked about him. His arms were held very securely by two bluecoats. A number of hard-looking men surrounded him. The prospect of escape did not seem particularly bright. His face underwent another change. It assumed a priestly, outraged innocence. A mist filmed his little eyes, as if he were truly the Christian martyr and these tyrants his pagan inquisitors. The Parson had often employed this trick of personality to good purpose.

"Inspector," he said, "you know you ain't got no right to grill me this way, don't you, Inspector? A man's got a right to his lawyer, ain't he? Sure he's got a right!"

And he stopped as if there were nothing more to be said.

The Inspector eyed him curiously. "When did you see Field last?" he asked.

"Field? You don't mean to say—Monte Field? Never heard of him, Inspector," muttered the Parson, rather shakily. "What are you tryin' to put over on me?"

"Not a thing, Parson, not a thing. But as long as you don't care to answer now, suppose we let you cool your heels for a while. Perhaps you'll have something to say later. . . . Don't forget, Parson, there's still that little matter of the Bonomo Silk robbery to go into." He turned to one of the policemen. "Escort our friend to that ante-room off the manager's office, and keep him company for a while, officer."

Ellery, reflectively watching the Parson being dragged toward the rear of the theatre, was startled to hear his father say, "The Parson isn't too bright, is he? To make a slip like that—!"

"Be thankful for small favors," smiled Ellery. "One error breeds twenty more."

The Inspector turned with a grin to confront Velie, who had just arrived with a sheaf of papers in his hand.

"Ah, Thomas is back," chuckled the Inspector, who seemed in good spirits. "And what have you found, Thomas?"

"Well, Inspector," replied the detective, ruffling the edges of his papers, "it's hard to say. This is half of the list—the other half isn't ready yet. But I think you'll find something interesting here."

He handed Queen a batch of hastily written names and addresses. They were the names which the Inspector had ordered Velie to secure by interrogation of the audience.

Queen, with Ellery at his shoulder, examined the list, studying each name carefully. He was half-way through the sheaf when he stiffened. He squinted at the name

which had halted him and looked up at Velie with a puzzled air.

"Morgan," he said thoughtfully. "Benjamin Morgan. Sounds mighty familiar, Thomas. What does it suggest to you?"

Velie smiled frostily. "I thought you'd ask me that, Inspector. Benjamin Morgan was Monte Field's law-partner until two years ago!"

Queen nodded. The three men stared into each other's eyes. Then the old man shrugged his shoulders and said briefly, "Have to see some more of Mr. Morgan, I'm afraid."

He turned back to the list with a sigh. Again he studied each name, looking up at intervals reflectively, shaking his head, and going on. Velie, who knew Queen's reputation for memory even more thoroughly than Ellery, watched his superior with respectful eyes.

Finally the Inspector handed the papers back to the detective. "Nothing else there, Thomas," he said. "Unless you caught something that escaped me. Did you?" His tone was grave.

Velie stared at the old man wordlessly, shook his head and started to walk away.

"Just a minute, Thomas," called Queen. "Before you get that second list completed, ask Morgan to step into Panzer's office, will you? Don't scare him. And by the way, see that he has his ticket-stub before he goes to the office." Velie departed.

The Inspector motioned to Panzer, who was watching a group of policemen being marshaled by detectives for Queen's work. The stout little manager hurried up.

"Mr. Panzer," inquired the Inspector, "at what time do your scrub-women generally start cleaning up?"

"Why, they've been here for quite a while now, Inspector, waiting to get to work. Most theatres are tidied

early in the morning, but I've always had my employees come immediately after the evening performance. Just what is on your mind?"

Ellery, who had frowned slightly when the Inspector spoke, brightened at the manager's reply. He began to polish his pince-nez with satisfaction.

"Here's what I want you to do, Mr. Panzer," continued Queen evenly. "Arrange to have your cleaning-women make a particularly thorough search to-night, after everybody is gone. They must pick up and save everything—everything, no matter how seemingly trivial—and they're to watch especially for ticket-stubs. Can you trust these people?"

"Oh, absolutely, Inspector. They've been with the theatre ever since it was built. You may be sure that nothing will be overlooked. What shall I do with the sweepings?"

"Wrap them carefully, address them to me and send them by a trustworthy messenger to headquarters to-morrow morning." The Inspector paused. "I want to impress upon you, Mr. Panzer, the importance of this task. It's much more important than it seems. Do you understand?"

"Certainly, certainly!" Panzer hastened away.

A detective with grizzled hair walked briskly across the carpet, turned down the left aisle and touched his hat to Queen. In his hand was a sheaf of papers resembling the one which Velie had presented.

"Sergeant Velie has asked me to give you this list of names. He says that it's the rest of the names and addresses of the people in the audience, Inspector."

Queen took the papers from the detective's hand with a sudden show of eagerness. Ellery leaned forward. The old man's eyes traveled slowly from name to name as his thin finger moved down each sheet. Near the bottom of

the last one he smiled, looked at Ellery triumphantly, and finished the page. He turned and whispered into his son's ear. A light came over Ellery's face as he nodded.

The Inspector turned back to the waiting detective. "Come here, Johnson," he said. Queen spread out the page he had been studying for the man's scrutiny. "I want you to find Velie and have him report to me at once. After you've done that, get hold of this woman"—his finger pointed to a name and a row-and-seat number next to it—"and ask her to step into the manager's office with you. You'll find a man by the name of Morgan there. Stay with both of them until you hear from me. Incidentally, if there's any conversation between them keep your ears open—I want to know what is said. Treat the woman courteously."

"Yes, sir. Velie also asked me to tell you," continued Johnson, "that he has a group of people separated from the rest of the audience—they're the ones who have no ticket-stubs. He'd like to know what you want done with them."

"Do their names appear on both lists, Johnson?" asked Queen, handing him the second sheaf for return to Velie.

"Yes, sir."

"Then tell Velie to let them leave with the others, but not before he makes a special list of their names. It won't be necessary for me to see or speak to them."

Johnson saluted and disappeared.

Queen turned to converse in low tones with Ellery, who seemed to have something on his mind. They were interrupted by the reappearance of Panzer.

"Inspector?" The manager coughed politely.

"Oh, yes, Panzer!" said the Inspector, whirling about. "Everything straight with regard to the cleaning-women?"

"Yes, sir. Is there anything else you would like me to

do . . . ? And, Inspector, I hope you will pardon me for asking, but how much longer will the audience have to wait? I have been receiving most disturbing inquiries from many people. I am hoping no trouble comes of this affair." His dark face was glistening with perspiration.

"Oh, don't worry about that, Panzer," said the Inspector casually. "Their wait is almost over. In fact, I am ordering my men to get them out of here in a few minutes. Before they leave, however, they'll have one thing more to complain about," he added with a grim smile.

"Yes, Inspector?"

"Oh, yes," said Queen. "They're going to submit to a search. No doubt they'll protest, and you'll hear threats of lawsuits and personal violence, but don't worry about it. I'm responsible for everything done here to-night, and I'll see that you're kept out of trouble. . . . Now, we'll need a woman-searcher to help our men. We have a police-matron here, but she's busy downstairs. Do you think you could get me a dependable woman—middle-aged preferably—who won't object to a thankless job and will know how to keep her mouth shut?"

The manager pondered for a moment. "I think I can get you the woman you want. She's a Mrs. Phillips, our wardrobe-mistress. She's well on in years and as pleasant as any one you could get for such a task."

"Just the person," said Queen briskly. "Get her at once and station her at the main exit. Detective-Sergeant Velie will give her the necessary instructions."

Velie had come up in time to hear the last remark. Panzer bustled down the aisle toward the boxes.

"Morgan set?" asked Queen.

"Yes, Inspector."

"Well, then, you have one more job and you'll be through for the night, Thomas. I want you to superintend

the departure of the people seated in the orchestra and boxes. Have them leave one by one, and overhaul them as they go out. No one is to leave by any exit except the main door, and just to make sure tell the men at the side exits to keep 'em moving toward the rear." Velie nodded. "Now, about the search. Piggott!" The detective came on the run. "Piggott, you accompany Mr. Queen and Sergeant Velie and help search every man who goes out the main door. There'll be a matron there to search the women. Examine every parcel. Go over their pockets for anything suspicious; collect all the ticket-stubs; and watch especially for *an extra hat*. The hat I want is a silk topper. But if you find any other kind of extra hat, nab the owner and be sure he's nabbed properly. Now, boys, get to work!"

Ellery, who had been lounging against a pillar, straightened up and followed Piggott. As Velie stalked behind Queen called, "Don't release the people in the balcony until the orchestra is empty. Send somebody up there to keep them quiet."

With his last important instruction given the Inspector turned to Doyle, who was standing guard nearby, and said quietly, "Shoot downstairs to the cloak-room, Doyle, my lad, and keep your eyes open while the people are getting their wraps. When they're all gone, search the place with a fine-comb. If there is anything left in the racks, bring it to me."

Queen leaned back against the pillar which loomed, a marble sentinel, over the seat in which murder had been done. As he stood there, eyes blank, hands clutching his lapels, the broad-shouldered Flint hurried up with a gleam of excitement in his eyes. Inspector Queen regarded him critically.

"Found something, Flint?" he asked, fumbling for his snuff-box.

The detective silently offered him a half-ticket, colored blue, and marked "LL30 Left."

"Well, well!" exclaimed Queen. "Wherever did you find that?"

"Right inside the main door," said Flint. "Looked as if it was dropped just as the owner came into the theatre."

Queen did not answer. With a swooping dip of his fingers he extracted from his vest pocket the blue-colored stub he had found on the dead man's person. He regarded them in silence—two identically colored and marked stubs, one with the inscription LL32 Left, the other LL30 Left.

His eyes narrowed as he studied the innocent-appearing pasteboards. He bent closer, slowly turning the stubs back to back. Then, with a puzzled light in his grey eyes, he turned them front to front. Still unsatisfied, he turned them back to front.

In none of the three positions did the torn edges of the tickets coincide!

CHAPTER V

IN WHICH INSPECTOR QUEEN CONDUCTS SOME LEGAL CONVERSATIONS

QUEEN made his way across the broad red carpet covering the rear of the orchestra, his hat pulled down over his eyes. He was searching the recesses of his pocket for the inevitable snuff-box. The Inspector was evidently engaged in a weighty mental process, for his hand closed tightly upon the two blue ticket-stubs and he grimaced, as if he were not at all satisfied with his thoughts.

Before opening the green-speckled door marked "Manager's Office," he turned to survey the scene behind him. The stir in the audience was businesslike. A great chattering filled the air; policemen and detectives circulated among the rows, giving orders, answering questions, hustling people out of their seats, lining them up in the main aisles to be searched at the huge outer door. The Inspector noticed absently that there was little protest from the audience at the ordeal they were facing. They seemed too tired to resent the indignity of a search. A long queue of half-angry, half-amused women was lined up at one side being examined rapidly, one by one, by a motherly woman dressed in black. Queen glanced briefly at the detectives blocking the door. Piggott with the experience of long practice was making rapid passes over the clothing of the men. Velie, at his side, was studying the reactions of the various people undergoing examination. Occasionally he searched a man himself. Ellery stood a little apart, hands in his capacious topcoat pockets, smoking a cigarette and seeming to be thinking of nothing

more important than the first edition he had missed buying.

Queen sighed, and went in.

The anteroom to the main office was a tiny place, fitted out in bronze and oak. On one of the chairs against the wall, burrowed into the deep leather cushions, sat Parson Johnny, puffing at a cigarette with a show of unconcern. A policeman stood by the chair, one massive hand on the Parson's shoulder.

"Trail along, Parson," said Queen casually, without stopping. The little gangster lounged to his feet, spun his cigarette butt deftly into a shining brass cuspidor, and slouched after the Inspector, the policeman treading on his heels.

Queen opened the door to the main office, glancing quickly about him as he stood on the threshold. Then he stepped aside, allowing the gangster and the bluecoat to precede him. The door banged shut behind them.

Louis Panzer had an unusual taste in office appointments. A clear green light-shade shone brilliantly above a carved desk. Chairs and smoking-stands; a skillfully wrought clothes-tree; silk-covered divan—these and other articles were strewn tastefully about the room. Unlike most managers' offices, Panzer's did not exploit photographs of stars, managers, producers and "angels." Several delicate prints, a huge tapestry, and a Constable oil painting hung on the walls.

But Inspector Queen's scrutiny at the moment was not for the artistic quality of Mr. Panzer's private chamber. It was rather for the six people who faced him. Beside Detective Johnson sat a middle-aged man inclining to corpulence, with shrewd eyes and a puzzled frown. He wore faultless evening clothes. In the next chair sat a young girl of considerable beauty, attired in a simple evening gown and wrap. She was looking up at a handsome young man in evening clothes, hat in hand, who was

bending over her chair and talking earnestly in an undertone. Beside them were two other women, both leaning forward and listening intently.

The stout man held aloof from the others. At Inspector Queen's entrance he immediately got to his feet with an inquiring look. The little group became silent and turned solemn faces on Queen.

With a deprecating cough Parson Johnny, accompanied by his escort, sidled across the rug and into a corner. He seemed overwhelmed by the splendor of the company in which he found himself. He shuffled his feet and cast a despairing look in the direction of the Inspector.

Queen moved over to the desk and faced the group. At a motion of his hand Johnson came quickly to his side.

"Who are the three extra people, Johnson?" he asked in a tone inaudible to the others.

"The old fellow there is Morgan," whispered Johnson, "and the good-looker sitting near him is the woman you told me to get. When I went for her in the orchestra I found the young chap and the other two women with her. The four of 'em were pretty chummy. I gave her your message, and she seemed nervous. But she stood up and came along like a major—only the other three came, too. I didn't know but what you'd like to see 'em, Inspector. . . ."

Queen nodded. "Hear anything?" he asked in the same low tone.

"Not a peep, Inspector. The old chap doesn't seem to know any of these people. The others have just been wondering why you could possibly want *her*."

The Inspector waved Johnson to a corner and addressed the waiting group.

"I've summoned two of you," he said pleasantly, "for a little chat. And since the others are here, too, it will be

all right for them to wait. But for the moment I must ask you all to step into the anteroom while I conduct a little business with this gentleman." He inclined his head toward the gangster, who stiffened indignantly.

With a flutter of excited conversation the two men and three women departed, Johnson closing the door behind them.

Queen whirled on Parson Johnny.

"Bring that rat here!" he snapped to the policeman. He sat down in Panzer's chair and drew the tips of his fingers together. The gangster was jerked to his feet and marched across the carpet, to be pushed directly in front of the desk.

"Now, Parson," said Queen menacingly, "I've got you where I want you. We're going to have a nice little talk with nobody to interrupt. Get me?"

The Parson was silent, his eyes liquid with distrust.

"So you won't say anything, eh, Johnny? How long do you think I'll let you get away with that?"

"I told you before—I don't know nothin' and besides I won't say nothin' till I see my lawyer," the gangster said sullenly.

"Your lawyer? Well, Parson, who *is* your lawyer?" asked the Inspector in an innocent tone.

The Parson bit his lip, remaining silent. Queen turned to Johnson.

"Johnson, my boy, you worked on the Babylon stick-up, didn't you?" he asked.

"Sure did, Chief," said the detective.

"That," explained Queen gently, to the gangster, "was when you were sent up for a year. Remember, Parson?"
Still silence.

"And Johnson," continued the Inspector, leaning back in his chair, "refresh my memory. Who was the lawyer defending our friend here?"

"Field. By—" Johnson exclaimed, staring at the Parson.

"Exactly. The gentleman now lying on one of our unfeeling slabs at the morgue. Well, Parson, what about it? Cut the comedy! Where do you come off saying you don't know Monte Field? You knew his first name, all right, when I mentioned only his last. Come clean, now!"

The gangster had sagged against the policeman, a futile despair in his eyes. He moistened his lips and said, "You got me there, Inspector. I—I don't know nothin' about this, though, honest. I ain't seen Field in a month. I didn't—my Gawd, you're not tryin' to tie this croakin' around my neck, are you?"

He stared at Queen in anguish. The policeman jerked him straight.

"Parson, Parson," said Queen, "how you do jump at conclusions. I'm merely looking for a little information. Of course, if you want to confess to the murder, I'll call my men in and we can get your story all straight and go home to bed. How about it?"

"No!" shouted the gangster, thrashing out suddenly with his arm. The officer caught it deftly and twisted it behind the squirming back. "Where do you get that stuff? I ain't confessin' nothin'. I don't know nothin'. I didn't see Field to-night an' I didn't even know he was here! Confess. . . . I got some mighty influential friends, Inspector—you can't pull that stuff on me, I'll tell you!"

"That's too bad, Johnny," sighed the Inspector. He took a pinch of snuff. "All right, then. You didn't kill Monte Field. What time did you get here to-night, and where's your ticket?"

The Parson twisted his hat in his hands. "I wasn't goin' to say nothin' before, Inspector, because I figured you was tryin' to railroad me. I can explain when and how I got here all right. It was about half past eight, and I got in on

a pass, that's how. Here's the stub to prove it." He searched carefully in his coat pocket and produced a perforated blue stub. He handed it to Queen, who glanced at it carelessly and put it in his pocket.

"And where," he asked, "and where did you get the pass, Johnny?"

"I—my girl give it to me, Inspector," replied the gangster nervously.

"Ah—the woman enters the case," said Queen jovially. "And what might this young Circe's name be, Johnny?"

"Who?—why, she's—hey, Inspector, don't get her in no trouble, will you?" burst out Parson Johnny. "She's a reg'lar kid, an' she don't know nothin' either. Honest, I—"

"Her name?" snapped Queen.

"Madge O'Connell," whined Johnny. "She's an usher here."

Queen's eyes lit up. A quick glance passed between him and Johnson. The detective left the room.

"So," continued the Inspector, leaning back again comfortably, "so my old friend Parson Johnny doesn't know a thing about Monte Field. Well, well, well! We'll see how your lady-friend's story backs you up." As he talked he looked steadily at the hat in the gangster's hand. It was a cheap black fedora, matching the sombre suit which the man was wearing. "Here, Parson," he said suddenly. "Hand over that hat of yours."

He took the head-piece from the gangster's reluctant hand and examined it. He pulled down the leather band inside, eyed it critically and finally handed it back.

"We forgot something, Parson," he said. "Officer, suppose you frisk Mr. Cazzanelli's person, eh?"

The Parson submitted to the search with an ill grace, but he was quiescent enough. "No gat," said the policeman briefly, and continued. He put his hand into the

man's hip-pocket, extracting a fat wallet. "Want this, Inspector?"

Queen took it, counted the money briskly, and handed it back to the policeman, who returned it to the pocket.

"One hundred and twenty-two smackers, Johnny," the old man murmured. "Seems to me I can smell Bonomo silk in these bills. However!" He laughed and said to the bluecoat, "No flask?" The policeman shook his head. "Anything under his vest or shirt?" Again a negative. Queen was silent until the search was completed. Parson Johnny relaxed with a sigh.

"Well, Johnny, mighty lucky night this is for you—Come in!" Queen said at a knock on the door. It opened to disclose the slender girl in usherette's uniform whom he had questioned earlier in the evening. Johnson came in after her and closed the door.

Madge O'Connell stood on the rug and stared with tragic eyes at her lover, who was thoughtfully studying the floor. She flashed a glance at Queen. Then her mouth hardened and she snapped at the gangster, "Well? So they got you after all, you sap! I told you not to try to make a break for it!" She turned her back contemptuously on the Parson and began to ply a powder-puff with vigor.

"Why didn't you tell me before, my girl," said Queen softly, "that you got a pass for your friend John Cazzanelli?"

"I ain't telling everything, Mr. Cop," she answered pertly. "Why should I? Johnny didn't have anything to do with this business."

"We won't discuss that," said the Inspector, toying with his snuff-box. "What I want you to tell me now, Madge, is whether your memory has improved any since I spoke to you."

"What d'ya mean?" she demanded.

"I mean this. You told me that you were at your regular station just before the show started—that you conducted a lot of people to their seats—that you didn't remember whether you ushered Monte Field, the dead man, to his row or not—and that you were standing up at the head of the left aisle all during the performance. *All* during the performance, Madge. Is that correct?"

"Sure it is, Inspector. Who says I wasn't?" The girl was growing excited, but Queen glanced at her fluttering fingers and they became still.

"Aw, cut it out, Madge," snapped the Parson unexpectedly. "Don't make it no worse than it is. Sooner or later he'll find out we were together anyways, and then he'd have something on you. You don't know this bird. Come clean, Madge!"

"So!" said the Inspector, looking pleasantly from the gangster to the girl. "Parson, you're getting sensible in your old age. Did I hear you say you two were together? When, and why, and for how long?"

Madge O'Connell's face had gone red and white by turns. She favored her lover with a venomous glance, then turned back to Queen.

"I guess I might as well spill it," she said disgustedly, "after this half-wit shows a yellow streak. Here's all I know, Inspector—and Gawd help you if you tell that little mutt of a manager about it!" Queen's eyebrows went up, but he did not interrupt her. "I got the pass for Johnny, all right," she continued defiantly, "because—well, Johnny kind of likes blood-and-thunder stuff, and it was his off-night. So I got him the pass. It was for two—all the passes are—so that the seat next to Johnny was empty all the time. It was an aisle seat on the left—best I could get for that loud-mouthed shrimp! During the first act I was pretty busy and couldn't sit with him. But after the first intermission, when the curtain went up on Act II,

things got slack and it was a good chance to sit next to him. Sure, I admit it—I was sittin' next to him nearly the whole act! Why not—don't I deserve a rest once in a while?"

"I see." Queen bent his brows. "You would have saved me a lot of time and trouble, young lady, if you'd told me this before. Didn't you get up at all during the second act?"

"Well, I did a couple of times, I guess," she said guardedly. "But everything was okay, and the manager wasn't around, so I went back."

"Did you notice this man Field as you passed?"

"No—no, sir."

"Did you notice if somebody was sitting next to him?"

"No, sir. I didn't even know he was there. Wasn't—wasn't looking that way, I guess."

"I suppose, then," continued Queen coldly, "you don't remember ushering somebody into the last row, next to the last seat, during the second act?"

"No, sir. . . . Aw, I know I shouldn't have done it, maybe, but I didn't see a thing wrong all night." She was growing more nervous at each question. She furtively glanced at the Parson, but he was staring at the floor.

"You're a great help, young lady," said Queen, rising suddenly. "Beat it."

As she turned to go, the gangster with an innocent leer slid across the rug to follow her. Queen made a sign to the policeman. The Parson found himself yanked back to his former position.

"Not so fast, Johnny," said Queen icily. "O'Connell!" The girl turned, trying to appear unconcerned. "For the time being I shan't say anything about this to Mr. Panzer. But I'd advise you to watch your step and learn to keep your mouth clean when you talk to your superiors. Get

out now, and if I ever hear of another break on your part God help *you!*"

She started to laugh, wavered and fled from the room.

Queen whirled on the policeman. "Put the nippers on him, officer," he snapped, jerking his finger toward the gangster, "and run him down to the station!"

The policeman saluted. There was a flash of steel, a dull click, and the Parson stared stupidly at the handcuffs on his wrists. Before he could open his mouth he was hustled out of the room.

Queen made a disgusted motion of his hand, threw himself into the leather-covered chair, took a pinch of snuff, and said to Johnson in an entirely different tone, "I'll trouble you, Johnson my boy, to ask Mr. Morgan to step in here."

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Benjamin Morgan entered Queen's temporary sanctum with a firm step that did not succeed entirely in concealing a certain bewildered agitation. He said in a cheerful, hearty baritone, "Well, sir, here I am," and sank into a chair with much the same air of satisfaction that a man exhales when he seats himself in his club-room after a hard day. Queen was not taken in. He favored Morgan with a long, earnest stare, which made the paunchy grizzled man squirm.

"My name is Queen, Mr. Morgan," he said in a friendly voice, "Inspector Richard Queen."

"I suspected as much," said Morgan, rising to shake hands. "I think you know who I am, Inspector. I was under your eye more than once in the Criminal Court years ago. There was a case—do you remember it?—I was defending Mary Doolittle when she was being tried for murder. . . ."

"Indeed, yes!" exclaimed the Inspector heartily. "I wondered where I'd seen you before. You got her off, too,

if I'm not mistaken. That was a mighty nice piece of work, Morgan—very, very nice. So *you're* the fellow! Well, well!"

Morgan laughed. "Was pretty nice, at that," he admitted. "But those days are over, I'm afraid, Inspector. You know—I'm not in the criminal end of it any more."

"No?" Queen took a pinch of snuff. "I didn't know that. Anything"—he sneezed—"anything go wrong?" he asked sympathetically.

Morgan was silent. After a moment he crossed his legs and said, "Quite a bit went wrong. May I smoke?" he asked abruptly. On Queen's assent he lit a fat cigar and became absorbed in its curling haze.

Neither man spoke for a long time. Morgan seemed to sense that he was under a rigid inspection, for he crossed and uncrossed his legs repeatedly, avoiding Queen's eyes. The old man appeared to be ruminating, his head sunk on his breast.

The silence became electric, embarrassing. There was not a sound in the room, except the ticking of a floor-clock in a corner. From somewhere in the theatre came a sudden burst of conversation. Voices were raised to a high pitch of indignation or protest. Then even this was cut off.

"Come, now, Inspector. . . ." Morgan coughed. He was enveloped in a thick rolling smoke from his cigar, and his voice was harsh and strained. "What is this—a refined third degree?"

Queen looked up, startled. "Eh? I beg your pardon, Mr. Morgan. My thoughts went wool-gathering, I guess. Been rubbing it in, have I? Dear me! I must be getting old." He rose and took a short turn about the room, his hands clasped loosely behind his back. Morgan's eyes followed him.

"Mr. Morgan"—the Inspector pounced on him with one

of his habitual conversational leaps—"do you know why I've asked you to stay and talk to me?"

"Why—I can't say I do, Inspector. I suppose, naturally, that it has to do with the accident here to-night. But what connection it can possibly have with me, I'll confess I don't know." Morgan puffed violently at his weed.

"Perhaps, Mr. Morgan, you will know in a moment," said Queen, leaning back against the desk. "The man murdered here to-night—it wasn't any accident, I can assure you of that—was a certain Monte Field."

The announcement was placid enough but the effect upon Morgan was astounding. He fairly leaped from his chair, eyes popping, hands trembling, breath hoarse and heavy. His cigar dropped to the floor. Queen regarded him with morose eyes.

"Monte—Field!" Morgan's cry was terrible in its intensity. He stared at the Inspector's face. Then he collapsed in the chair, his whole body sagging.

"Pick up your cigar, Mr. Morgan," said Queen. "I shouldn't like to abuse Mr. Panzer's hospitality." The lawyer stooped mechanically and retrieved the cigar.

"My friend," thought Queen to himself, "either you are one of the world's greatest actors or you just got the shock of your life!" He straightened up. "Come now, Mr. Morgan—pull yourself together. Why should the death of Field affect you in this way?"

"But—but, man! Monte Field. . . . Oh, my God!" And he threw back his head and laughed—a wild humor that made Queen sit up alertly. The spasm continued, Morgan's body rocking to and fro in hysteria. The Inspector knew the symptoms. He slapped the lawyer in the face, pulling him to his feet by his coat-collar.

"Don't forget yourself, Morgan!" commanded Queen. The rough tone had its effect. Morgan stopped laughing,

regarded Queen with a blank expression, and dropped heavily into the chair—still shaken, but himself.

"I'm—I'm sorry, Inspector," he muttered, dabbing his face with a handkerchief. "It was—quite a surprise."

"Evidently," said Queen dryly. "You couldn't have acted more surprised if the earth had opened under your feet. Now, Morgan, what's this all about?"

The lawyer continued to wipe the perspiration from his face. He was shaking like a leaf, his jowls red. He gnawed at his lip in indecision.

"All right, Inspector," he said at last. "What do you want to know?"

"That's better," said Queen approvingly. "Suppose you tell me when you last saw Monte Field."

The lawyer cleared his throat nervously. "Why—why, I haven't seen him for ages," he said in a low voice. "I suppose you know that we were partners once—we had a successful legal practice. Then something happened and we broke up. I—I haven't seen him since."

"And that was how long ago?"

"A little over two years."

"Very good." Queen leaned forward. "I'm anxious to know, too, just why the two of you broke up your partnership."

The lawyer looked down at the rug, fingering his cigar. "I—well, I guess you know Field's reputation as well as I. We didn't agree on ethics, had a little argument and decided to dissolve."

"You parted amicably?"

"Well—under the circumstances, yes."

Queen drummed on the desk. Morgan shifted uneasily. He was evidently still laboring under the effects of his astonishment.

"What time did you get to the theatre to-night, Morgan?" asked the Inspector.

Morgan seemed surprised at the question. "Why—about a quarter after eight," he replied.

"Let me see your ticket-stub, please," said Queen.

The lawyer handed it over after fumbling for it in several pockets. Queen took it, extracted from his own pocket the three stubs he had secreted there, and lowered his hands below the level of the desk. He looked up in a moment, his eyes expressionless as he returned the four bits of pasteboard to his own pocket.

"So you were sitting in M2, Center, were you? Pretty good seat, Morgan," he remarked. "Just what made you come to see 'Gunplay' to-night, anyway?"

"Why, it *is* a rum sort of show, isn't it, Inspector?" Morgan appeared embarrassed. "I don't know that I would ever have thought of coming—I'm not a theatre-going man, you know—except that the Roman management was kind enough to send me a complimentary ticket for this evening's performance."

"Is that a fact?" exclaimed Queen ingenuously. "Quite nice of them, I'd say. When did you receive the ticket?"

"Why, I got the ticket and the letter Saturday morning, Inspector, at my office."

"Oh, you got a letter, too, eh? You don't happen to have it around you, do you?"

"I'm—pretty—sure I—have," grunted Morgan as he began to search his pockets. "Yes! Here it is."

He offered the Inspector a small, rectangular sheet of white paper, deckle-edged and of crushed bond stock. Queen handled it gingerly as he held it up to the light. Through the few typewritten lines on it a watermark was distinctly visible. His lips puckered, and he laid the sheet cautiously on the desk-blotter. As Morgan watched, he opened the top drawer of Panzer's desk and rummaged about until he found a piece of note-paper. It was large,

square, and heavily glazed with an ornate theatre-insignia engraved on an upper quarter. Queen put the two pieces of paper side by side, thought a moment, then sighed and picked up the sheet which Morgan had handed him. He read it through slowly.

The Management of the Roman Theatre cordially invites the attendance of Mr. Benjamin Morgan at the Monday evening, September twenty-fourth performance of GUNPLAY. As a leading figure of the New York bar, Mr. Morgan's opinion of the play as a social and legal document is earnestly solicited. This, however, is by no means obligatory; and the Management wishes further to assure Mr. Morgan that the acceptance of its invitation entails no obligation whatsoever.

(Signed) THE ROMAN THEATRE
Per: S.

The "S" was a barely decipherable ink-scrawl.

Queen looked up, smiling. "Mighty nice of the Theatre, Mr. Morgan. I just wonder now—" Still smiling, he signalled to Johnson, who had been sitting in a corner chair, silent spectator to the interview.

"Get Mr. Panzer, the manager, for me, Johnson," said Queen. "And if the publicity man—chap by the name of Bealson, or Pealson, or something—is around, have him step in here, too."

He turned to the lawyer after Johnson left.

"Let me trouble you for your gloves a moment, Mr. Morgan," he said lightly.

With a puzzled stare, Morgan dropped them on the desk in front of Queen, who picked them up curiously. They were of white silk—the conventional gloves for evening-wear. The Inspector pretended to be very busy examining them. He turned them inside out, minutely scrutinized a speck on the tip of one finger, and even went so far as to try them on his own hands, with a jesting re-

mark to Morgan. His examination concluded, he gravely handed the gloves back to the lawyer.

"And—oh, yes, Mr. Morgan—that's a mighty spruce-looking tophat you've got there. May I see it a moment?"

Still silently, the lawyer placed his hat on the desk. Queen picked it up with a carefree air, whistling in a slightly flat key, "The Sidewalks of New York." He turned the hat over in his hand. It was a glistening affair of extremely fine quality. The lining was of shimmering white silk, with the name of the maker, "James Chauncey Co.," stamped in gold. Two initials, "B.M.," were similarly inlaid on the band.

Queen grinned as he placed the hat on his own head. It was a close fit. He doffed it almost immediately and returned it to Morgan.

"Very kind of you to allow me these liberties, Mr. Morgan," he said as he hastily scribbled a note on a pad which he took from his pocket.

The door opened to admit Johnson, Panzer and Harry Neilson. Panzer stepped forward hesitantly and Neilson dropped into an armchair.

"What can we do for you, Inspector?" quavered Panzer, making a valiant attempt to disregard the presence of the grizzled aristocrat slumped in his chair.

"Mr. Panzer," said Queen slowly, "how many kinds of stationery are used in the Roman Theatre?"

The manager's eyes opened wide. "Just one, Inspector. There's a sheet of it on the desk in front of you."

"Ummmm." Queen handed Panzer the slip of paper which he had received from Morgan. "I want you to examine that sheet very carefully, Mr. Panzer. To your knowledge, are there any samples of it in the Roman?"

The manager looked it over with an unfamiliar stare. "No, I don't think so. In fact, I'm sure of it. What's this?" he exclaimed, as his eye caught the first few type-

written lines. "Neilson!" he cried, whirling on the publicity man. "What's this—your latest publicity stunt?" He waved the sheet in Neilson's face.

Neilson snatched it from his employer's hand and read it quickly. "Well, I'll be switched!" he said softly. "If **that** doesn't beat the non-stop exploitation record!" He reread it, an admiring look on his face. Then, with four pairs of eyes trained accusingly on him, he handed it back to Panzer. "I'm sorry I have to deny any share in this brilliant idea," he drawled. "Why the deuce didn't *I* think of it?" And he retreated to his corner, arms folded on his chest.

The manager turned to Queen in bewilderment. "This is very peculiar, Inspector. To my knowledge the Roman Theatre has never used this stationery, and I can state positively that I never authorized any such publicity stunt. And if Neilson denies a part in it—" He shrugged his shoulders.

Queen placed the paper carefully in his pocket. "That will be all, gentlemen. Thank you." He dismissed the two men with a nod.

He looked appraisingly at the lawyer, whose face was suffused with a fiery color that reached from his neck to the roots of his hair. The Inspector raised his hand and let it drop with a little bang on the desk.

"What do you think of *that*, Mr. Morgan?" he asked simply.

Morgan leaped to his feet. "It's a damned frame-up!" he shouted, shaking his fist in Queen's face. "I don't know any more about it than—than *you* do, if you'll pardon a little impertinence! What's more, if you think you can scare me by this hocus-pocus searching of gloves and hats and—and, by God, you haven't examined my underwear yet, Inspector!" He stopped for lack of breath, his face purple.

"But, my dear Morgan," said the Inspector mildly, "why do you upset yourself so? One would think I've been accusing you of Monte Field's murder. Sit down and cool off, man; I asked you a simple question."

Morgan collapsed in his chair. He passed a quivering hand over his forehead and muttered, "Sorry, Inspector. Lost my temper. But of all the rotten deals—" He subsided, mumbling to himself.

Queen sat staring quizzically at him. Morgan was making a great to-do with his handkerchief and cigar. Johnson coughed deprecatingly, looking up at the ceiling. Again a burst of sound penetrated the walls, only to be throttled in mid-air.

Queen's voice cut sharply into the silence. "That's all, Morgan. You may go."

The lawyer lumbered to his feet, opened his mouth as if to speak, clamped his lips together and, clapping his hat on his head, walked out of the room. Johnson innocently lounged forward to help him with the door, on a signal from the Inspector. Both men disappeared.

Queen, left alone in the room, immediately fell into a fierce preoccupation. He took from his pockets the four stubs, the letter Morgan had given him and the woman's rhinestone evening bag which he had found in the dead man's pocket. This last article he opened for the second time that evening and spread its contents on the desk before him. A few calling cards, with the name "Frances Ives-Pope" neatly engraved; two dainty lace handkerchiefs; a vanity case filled with powder, rouge and lipstick; a small change-purse containing twenty dollars in bills and a few coins; and a house-key. Queen fingered these articles thoughtfully for a moment, returned them to the handbag and putting bag, stubs and letter back into his pocket once more, rose and looked slowly about. He crossed the room to the clothes-tree, picked up the single

hat, a derby, hanging there and examined its interior. The initials "L.P." and the head-size, "6¾," seemed to interest him.

He replaced the hat and opened the door.

The four people sitting in the anteroom jumped to their feet with expressions of relief. Queen stood smiling on the threshold, his hands jammed into his coat pockets.

"Here we are at last," he said. "Won't you all please step into the office?"

He politely stood aside to let them pass—the three women and the young man. They trooped in with a flurry of excitement, the women sitting down as the young man busied himself setting chairs for them. Four pairs of eyes gazed earnestly at the old man by the door. He smiled paternally, took one quick glance into the anteroom, closed the door and marched in a stately way to the desk, where he sat down, feeling for his snuff-box.

"Well!" he said genially. "I must apologize for having kept you people waiting so long—official business, you know. . . . Now, let's see. Hmmm. Yes. . . . Yes, yes. I must— All right! Now, in the first place, ladies and gentleman, how do we stand?" He turned his mild gaze on the most beautiful of the three women. "I believe, miss, that your name is Frances Ives-Pope, although I haven't had the pleasure of being introduced. Am I correct?"

The girl's eyebrows went up. "That's quite correct, sir," she said in a vibrant musical voice. "Although I don't quite understand how you know my name."

She smiled. It was a magnetic smile, full of charm and a certain strong womanliness that was extremely attractive. A full-bodied creature in the bloom of youth, with great brown eyes and a creamy complexion, she radiated a wholesomeness that the Inspector found refreshing.

He beamed down at her. "Well, Miss Ives-Pope," he

chuckled, "I suppose it is mysterious to a layman. And the fact that I am a policeman no doubt heightens the general effect. But it's quite simple. You are by no means an unphotographed young lady—I saw your picture in the paper to-day, as a matter of fact, on the society page."

The girl laughed, a trifle nervously. "So that's how it was!" she said. "I was beginning to be frightened. Just what is it, sir, that you want of me?"

"Business—always business," said the Inspector ruefully. "Just when I'm getting interested in someone, I'm brought bang-up against my profession. . . . Before we conduct our inquisition, may I ask who your friends are?"

An embarrassed coughing arose from the three people on whom Queen bent his eye. Frances said charmingly, "I'm sorry—Inspector, is it? Allow me to introduce Miss Hilda Orange and Miss Eve Ellis, my very dear friends. And this is Mr. Stephen Barry, my fiancé."

Queen glanced at them in some surprise. "If I'm not mistaken—aren't you members of the cast of 'Gunplay'?"

There was a unanimous nodding of heads.

Queen turned to Frances. "I don't want to seem too officious, Miss Ives-Pope, but I want you to explain something. . . . Why are you accompanied by your friends?" he asked with a disarming smile. "I know it sounds impertinent, but I distinctly recall ordering my man to summon you—alone. . . ."

The three thespians rose stiffly. Frances turned from her companions to the Inspector with a pleading look.

"I—please forgive me, Inspector," she said swiftly. "I—I've never been questioned by the police before. I was nervous and—and I asked my fiancé and these two ladies, who are my most intimate friends, to be present during the interview. I didn't realize that I was going against your wishes. . . ."

"I understand," returned Queen, smiling. "I understand completely. But you see—" He made a gesture of finality.

Stephen Barry leaned over the girl's chair. "I'll stay with you, dear, if you give the word." He glared at the Inspector belligerently.

"But, Stephen, dear—" Frances cried helplessly. Queen's face was adamant. "You—you'd better all go. But please wait for me outside. It won't take long, will it, Inspector?" she asked, her eyes unhappy.

Queen shook his head. "Not so very long." His entire attitude had changed. He seemed to be growing truculent. His audience sensed the metamorphosis in him and in an intangible manner grew antagonistic.

Hilda Orange, a large buxom woman of forty, with traces of a handsome youth in her face, now brutally shorn of its make-up in the cold light of the room, leaned over Frances and glared at the Inspector.

"We'll be waiting outside for you, my dear," she said grimly. "And if you feel faint, or something, just screech a little and you'll see what action means." She flounced out of the room. Eve Ellis patted Frances' hand. "Don't worry, Frances," she said in her soft, clear voice. "We're with you." And taking Barry's arm, she followed Hilda Orange. Barry looked back with a mixture of anger and solicitude, shooting a vitriolic glance at Queen as he slammed the door.

Queen was instantly on his feet, his manner brisk and impersonal. He gazed fully into Frances' eyes, his palms pressed against the top surface of the desk. "Now, Miss Frances Ives-Pope," he said clearly, "this is all the business I have to transact with you. . . ." He dipped into his pocket and produced with something of the stage-magician's celerity the rhinestone bag. "I want to return your bag."

Frances half-rose to her feet, staring from him to the shimmering purse, the color drained from her face. "Why, that's—that's my evening bag!" she stammered.

"Precisely, Miss Ives-Pope," said Queen. "It was found in the theatre—to-night."

"Of course!" The girl dropped back into her seat with a little nervous laugh. "How stupid of me! And I didn't miss it until just now. . . ."

"But, Miss Ives-Pope," the little Inspector continued deliberately, "the finding of your purse is not nearly as important as the place in which it was found." He paused. "You know that there was a man murdered here this evening?"

She stared at him open-mouthed, a wild fear gathering in her eyes. "Yes, I heard so," she breathed.

"Well, your bag, Miss Ives-Pope," continued Queen inexorably, "was found in the murdered man's pocket!"

Terror gleamed in the girl's eyes. Then, with a choked scream, she toppled forward in the chair, her face white and strained.

Queen sprang forward, concern and sympathy instantly apparent on his face. As he reached the limp form, the door burst open and Stephen Barry, coat-tails flying, catapulted into the room. Hilda Orange, Eve Ellis and Johnson, the detective, hurried in behind him.

"What in hell have you done to her, you damned snooper!" the actor cried, shouldering Queen out of the way. He gathered Frances' body tenderly in his arms, pushing aside the wisps of black hair tumbled over her eyes, crooning desperately in her ear. She sighed and looked up in bewilderment as she saw the flushed young face close to hers. "Steve, I—fainted," she murmured, and dropped back in his arms.

"Get some water, somebody," the young man growled, chafing her hands. A tumbler was promptly pushed over

his shoulder by Johnson. Barry forced a few drops down Frances' throat and she choked, coming back to consciousness. The two actresses pushed Barry aside and brusquely ordered the men to leave. Queen meekly followed the protesting actor and the detective.

"You're a fine cop, you are!" said Barry scathingly, to the Inspector. "What did you do to her—hit her over the head with the policeman's usual finesse?"

"Now, now, young man," said Queen mildly, "no harsh words, please. The young lady simply received a shock."

They stood in a strained silence until the door opened and the actresses appeared supporting Frances between them. Barry flew to her side. "Are you all right now, dear?" he whispered, pressing her hand.

"Please—Steve—take me—home," she gasped, leaning heavily on his arm.

Inspector Queen stood aside to let them pass. There was a mournful look in his eyes as he watched them walk slowly to the main door and join the short line going out.

CHAPTER VI

IN WHICH THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY TURNS BIOGRAPHER

INSPECTOR RICHARD QUEEN was a peculiar man. Small and wiry, thatched with grey and wrinkled in fine lines of experience, he might have been a business executive, a night-watchman, or what he chose. Certainly, in the proper raiment, his quiet figure would mold itself to any disguise.

This ready adaptability was carried out in his manner as well. Few people knew him as he was. To his associates, to his enemies, to the forlorn scraps of humanity whom he turned over to the due processes of the law, he remained ever a source of wonder. He could be theatrical when he chose, or mild, or pompous, or fatherly, or bulldogging.

But underneath, as someone has said with an over-emphatic sentimentality, the Inspector had "a heart of gold." Inside he was harmless, and keen, and not a little hurt by the cruelties of the world. It was true that to the people who officially came under his eye he was never twice the same. He was constantly whirling into some new facet of personality. He found this to be good business; people never understood him, never knew what he was going to do or say, and consequently they were always a little afraid of him.

Now that he was alone, back in Panzer's office, the door shut tight, his investigations temporarily halted, the true character of the man shone from his face. At this moment it was an old face—old physically, old and wise spiri-

tually. The incident of the girl he had startled into unconsciousness was uppermost in his mind. The memory of her drawn, horrified face made him wince. Frances Ives-Pope seemed to personify everything a man of years could hope for in his own daughter. To see her shrink under the lash pained him. To see her fiancé turn fiercely in her defense made him blush.

Abstemious except for his one mild dissipation, the Inspector reached for his snuff-box with a sigh and sniffed freely. . . .

When there came a peremptory knock on the door, he was the chameleon again—a detective-inspector sitting at a desk and no doubt thinking clever and ponderous thoughts. In truth, he was wishing that Ellery would come back.

At his hearty "Come in!" the door swung open to admit a thin, bright-eyed man dressed in heavy overclothes, a woolen muffler wound about his neck.

"Henry!" exclaimed the Inspector, starting to his feet. "What the dickens are you doing here? I thought the doctor had ordered you to stay in bed!"

District Attorney Henry Sampson winked as he slumped into an armchair.

"Doctors," he said didactically, "doctors give me a pain in the neck. How are tricks?"

He groaned and felt his throat gingerly. The Inspector sat down again.

"For a grown man, Henry," he said decisively, "you're the most unruly patient I've ever seen. Man alive, you'll catch pneumonia if you don't watch out!"

"Well," grinned the District Attorney, "I carry a lot of insurance, so I should worry. . . . You haven't answered my question."

"Oh, yes," grunted Queen. "Your question. How's tricks, I think you asked? Tricks, my dear Henry, are at

present in a state of complete nullity. Does that satisfy you?"

"Kindly be more explicit," said Sampson. "Remember, I'm a sick man and my head is buzzing."

"Henry," said Queen, leaning forward earnestly, "I warn you that we're in the midst of one of the toughest cases this department has ever handled. . . . Is *your* head buzzing? I'd hate to tell you what's happening in mine!"

Sampson regarded him with a frown. "If it's as you say—and I suppose it is—this comes at a rotten time. Election's not so far off—an unsolved murder handled by the improper parties. . . ."

"Well, that's one way of looking at it," remarked Queen, in a low voice. "I wasn't exactly thinking of this affair in terms of votes, Henry. A man's been killed—and at the moment I'll be frank enough to admit that I haven't the slightest idea who did the job or how."

"I accept your well-meant rebuke, Inspector," said Sampson, in a lighter tone. "But if you'd heard what I did a few moments ago—over the telephone . . ."

"One moment, my dear Watson, as Ellery would say," chuckled Queen, with that startling change of temperament so characteristic of him. "I'll bet I know what happened. You were at home, probably in bed. Your telephone rang. A voice began to crab, protest, gurgle, and do all the other things a voice does when its owner is excited. The voice said, 'I won't stand for being cooped up by the police, like a common criminal! I want that man Queen severely reprimanded! He's a menace to personal liberty!' And so on, in words of that general tenor. . . ."

"My dear fellow!" said Sampson, laughing.

"This gentleman, the owner of the protesting voice," continued the Inspector, "is short, rather stout, wears gold-rimmed eyeglasses, has an exceedingly disagreeable feminine

voice, displays a really touching concern for his family—one wife and one daughter—in the presence of possible publicity agents, and always refers to you as his ‘very good friend, District Attorney Sampson.’ Correct?”

Sampson sat staring at him. Then his keen face creased into a smile.

“Perfectly astounding, my dear Holmes!” he murmured. “Since you know so much about my friend, perhaps it would be child’s-play for you to give me his name?”

“Er—but that was the fellow, wasn’t it?” said Queen, his face scarlet. “I—Ellery, my boy! I’m glad to see you!”

Ellery had entered the room. He shook hands cordially with Sampson, who greeted him with a pleasure born of long association, and made a remark about the dangers of a District Attorney’s life, briskly setting down on the desk a huge container of coffee and a paper bag pleasantly suggestive of French pastry.

“Well, gentlemen, the great search is finished, over, *kaput*, and the perspiring detectives will now partake of midnight tiffin.” He laughed and slapped his father affectionately on the shoulder.

“But, Ellery!” cried Queen delightedly. “This is a welcome surprise! Henry, will you join us in a little celebration?” He filled three paper cups with the steaming coffee.

“I don’t know what you’re celebrating, but count me in,” said Sampson and the three men fell to with enthusiasm.

“What’s happened, Ellery?” asked the old man, sipping his coffee contentedly.

“Gods do not eat, neither do they drink,” murmured Ellery, from behind a cream puff. “I am not omnipotent, and suppose you tell me what happened in your impromptu torture-chamber. . . . I can tell you one thing you don’t know, however. Mr. Libby, of Libby’s ice-cream parlor,

whence came these elegant cakes, confirms Jess Lynch's story about the ginger ale. And Miss Elinor Libby nicely corroborated the alley story."

Queen wiped his lips daintily with a huge handkerchief. "Well, let Prouty make sure about the ginger ale, anyway. As for me, I interviewed several people and now I have nothing to do."

"Thank you," remarked Ellery dryly. "That was a perfect recitation. Have you acquainted the D. A. with the events of this tumultuous evening?"

"Gentlemen," said Sampson, setting down his cup, "here's what I know. About a half-hour ago I was telephoned by 'one of my very good friends'—who happens to wield a little power behind the scenes—and he told me in no uncertain terms that during to-night's performance a man was murdered. Inspector Richard Queen, he said, had descended upon the theatorium like a whirlwind, accompanied by his minor whirlwinds, and had proceeded to make everybody wait over an hour—an inexcusable, totally unwarranted procedure, my friend charged. He further deposed that said Inspector even went so far as to accuse him personally of the crime, and had domineering policemen search him and his wife and daughter before they were allowed to leave the theatre.

"So much for my informant's story—the rest of his conversation, being rather profane, is irrelevant. The only other thing I know is that Velie told me outside who the murdered man was. And *that*, gentlemen, was the most interesting part of the whole story."

"You know almost as much about this case as I do," grunted Queen. "Probably more, because I have an idea you are thoroughly familiar with Field's operations. . . . Ellery, what happened outside during the search?"

Ellery crossed his legs comfortably. "As you might have guessed, the search of the audience was entirely with-

out result. Nothing out of the way was found. Not one solitary thing. Nobody looked guilty, and nobody took it upon himself to confess. In other words, it was a complete fiasco."

"Of course, of course," said Queen. "There's somebody almighty clever behind this business. I suppose you didn't even come across the suspicion of an extra hat?"

"That, dad," remarked Ellery, "was what I was decorating the lobby for. No—no hat."

"Are they all through out there?"

"Just finished when I strolled across the street for the refreshments," said Ellery. "There was nothing else to do but allow the angry mob in the gallery to file downstairs and out into the street. Everybody's out now—the galleryites, the employees, the cast. . . . Queer species, actors. All night they play God and then suddenly they find themselves reduced to ordinary street clothes and the ills that flesh is heir to. By the way, Velie also searched the five people who came out of this office. Quite a motor that young lady possesses. Miss Ives-Pope and her party, I gathered. . . . Didn't know but that you might have forgotten them," he chuckled.

"So we're up a tree, eh?" muttered the Inspector. "Here's the story, Henry." And he gave a concise résumé of the evening's events to Sampson, who sat silently throughout, frowning.

"And that," concluded Queen, after describing briefly the scenes enacted in the little office, "is that. Now, Henry, you must have something to tell us about Monte Field. We know that he was a slick article—but that's all we do know."

"That would be putting it mildly," said Sampson savagely. "I can give you almost by rote the story of his life. It looks to me as if you're going to have a difficult time and some incident in his past might give you a clue.

"Field first came under the scrutiny of my office during my predecessor's régime. He was suspected of negotiating a swindle connected with the bucket-shop scandals. Cronin, an assistant D. A. at the time, couldn't get a thing on him. Field had covered his operations well. All we had was the telltale story, which might or might not have been true, of a 'stool-pigeon' who had been kicked out of the mob. Of course, Cronin never let on to Field directly or indirectly that he was under suspicion. The affair blew over and although Cronin was a bulldog, every time he thought he had something he found that he had nothing after all. Oh, no question about it—Field was slick.

"When I came into office, on Cronin's fervent suggestion we began an exhaustive investigation of Field's background. On the q. t., of course. And this is what we discovered: Monte Field came of a blue-blood New England family—the kind that doesn't brag about its Mayflower descendants. He had private tutoring as a kid, went to a swanky prep school, got through by the skin of his teeth and then was sent to Harvard by his father as a sort of last despairing gesture. He seems to have been a pretty bad egg even as a boy. Nothing criminal, but just wild. On the other hand, he must have had a grain of pride because when the blow-up came he actually shortened his name. The family name was Fielding—and he became Monte Field."

Queen and Ellery nodded, Ellery's eyes introspective, Queen staring steadily at Sampson.

"Field," resumed Sampson, "wasn't a total loss, understand. He had brains. He studied law brilliantly at Harvard. He seemed to have a flair for oratory that was considerably aided by his profound knowledge of legal technology. But just after his graduation, before his family could get even the bit of pleasure out of his scholas-

tic career that should have been theirs, he was mixed up in a dirty deal with a girl. His father cut him off in jig-time. He was through—out—he'd disgraced the family name—you know the sort of thing. . . .

"Well, this friend of ours didn't let grief overwhelm him, evidently. He made the best of being done out of a nice little legacy, and decided to go out and make some money on his own. How he managed to get along during this period we couldn't find out, but the next thing we hear of him is that he has formed a partnership with a fellow by the name of Cohen. One of the smoothest shysters in the business. What a partnership that was! They cleaned up a fortune between them by establishing a select clientele chosen from among the biggest crooks in crookdom. Now, you know as well as I just how hard it is to 'get' anything on a bird who knows more about the loopholes of the law than the Supreme Court judges. They got away with everything—it was a golden era for crime. Crooks considered themselves top-notch when Cohen & Field were kind enough to defend them.

"And then Mr. Cohen, who was the experienced man of the combination, knowing the ropes, making the 'contacts' with the firm's clients, fixing the fees—and he could do that beautifully in spite of his inability to speak untainted English—Mr. Cohen, I say, met a very sad end one winter night on the North River waterfront. He was found shot through the head, and although it's twelve years since the happy event, the murderer is still unknown. That is—unknown in the legal sense. We had grave suspicions as to his identity. I shouldn't be at all surprised if Mr. Field's demise this evening removed the Cohen case from the register."

"So that's the kind of playboy he was," murmured Ellery. "Even in death his face is most disagreeable. Too bad I had to lose my first-edition on his account."

"Forget it, you bookworm," growled his father. "Go on, Henry."

"Now," said Sampson, taking the last piece of cake from the desk and munching it heartily, "now we come to a bright spot in Mr. Field's life. For after the unfortunate decease of his partner, he seemed to turn over a new leaf. He actually went to work—real legal work—and of course he had the brains to pull it through. For a number of years he worked alone, gradually effacing the bad reputation he had built up in the profession and even gaining a little respect now and then from some of our hoity-toity legal lights.

"This period of apparent good behavior lasted for six years. Then he met Ben Morgan—a solid man with a spotless record and a good reputation, although perhaps lacking the vital spark which makes the great lawyer. Somehow Field persuaded Morgan to join him in partnership. Then things began to hum.

"You'll remember that in that period some highly shady things were happening in New York. We got faint inklings of a gigantic criminal ring, composed of 'fences,' crooks, lawyers, and in some cases politicians. Some smashing big robberies were pulled off; bootlegging got to be a distinct art in the city environs; and a number of daring hold-ups resulting in murder put the department on its toes. But you know that as well as I do. You fellows 'got' some of them; but you never broke the ring, and you never reached the men higher up. And I have every reason to believe that our late friend Mr. Monte Field was the brains behind the whole business.

"See how easy it was for a man of his talents. Under the tutelage of Cohen, his first partner, he had become thoroughly familiar with the underworld moguls. When Cohen outlived his usefulness, he was conveniently bumped off. Then Field—remember, I am working now on specu-

lation chiefly, because the evidence is practically nil—then Field, under the cloak of a respectable legal business, absolutely above-board, quietly built up a far-flung criminal organization. How he accomplished this we have no way of knowing, of course. When he was quite ready to shoot the works, he tied up with a well-known respectable partner, Morgan, and now secure in his legal position, began to engineer most of the big crooked deals pulled off in the last five years or so. . . .”

“Where does Morgan come in?” asked Ellery idly.

“I was coming to that. Morgan, we have every reason to believe, was absolutely innocent of any connection with Field’s under-cover operations. He was as straight as a die and in fact had often refused cases in which the defendant was a shady character. Their relations must have become strained when Morgan got a hint of what was going on. Whether this is so or not I don’t know—you could easily find out from Morgan himself. Anyway, they broke up. Since the dissolution, Field has operated a little more in the open, but still not a shred of tangible evidence which would count in a court of law.”

“Pardon me for interrupting, Henry,” said Queen reflectively, “but can’t you give me a little more information on their break-up? I’d like to use it as a check on Morgan when I talk to him again.”

“Oh, yes!” replied Sampson grimly. “I’m glad you reminded me. Before the last word was written in the dissolving of the partnership, the two men had a terrific blow-up which almost resulted in tragedy. At the Webster Club, where they were lunching, they were heard quarreling violently. The argument increased until it was necessary for the bystanders to interfere. Morgan was beside himself with rage and actually threatened Field’s life right then and there. Field, I understand, was quite calm.”

"Did any of the witnesses get an inkling of the cause of the quarrel?" asked Queen.

"Unfortunately, no. The thing blew over soon enough; they dissolved quietly and that was the last anybody ever heard of it. Until, of course, to-night."

There was a pregnant silence when the District Attorney stopped talking. Ellery whistled a few bars of a Schubert air, while Queen frankly took a pinch of snuff with a ferocious vigor.

"I'd say, off-hand," murmured Ellery, looking off into space, "that Mr. Morgan is in deucedly hot water."

His father grunted. Sampson said seriously, "Well, that's your affair, gentlemen. I know what my job is. Now that Field is out of the way, I'm going to have his files and records gone over with a fine-comb. If nothing else, his murder will accomplish eventually, I hope, the complete annihilation of his gang. I'll have a man at his office in the morning."

"One of my men is camping there already," remarked Queen absently. "So you think it's Morgan, do you?" he asked Ellery, with a flash of his eyes.

"I seem to recall making a remark a minute ago," said Ellery calmly, "to the effect that Mr. Morgan is in hot water. I did not commit myself further. I admit that Morgan seems to be the logical man.—Except, gentlemen, for one thing," he added.

"The hat," said Inspector Queen instantly.

"No," said Ellery, "*the other hat.*"

CHAPTER VII

THE QUEENS TAKE STOCK

"LET's see where we stand," continued Ellery without pausing. "Let's consider this thing in its most elementary light.

"These, roughly, are the facts: A man of shady character, Monte Field, probable head of a vast criminal organization, with undoubtedly a host of enemies, is found murdered in the Roman Theatre ten minutes before the end of the second act, at precisely 9:55 o'clock. He is discovered by a man named William Pusak, a clerk of an inferior type of intelligence, who is sitting five seats away in the same row. This man, attempting to leave, pushes his way past the victim who before he dies mutters, 'Murder! Been murdered!' or words to that effect.

"A policeman is called and to make sure the man is dead, secures the services of a doctor in the audience, who definitely pronounces the victim killed by some form of alcoholic poisoning. Subsequently Dr. Prouty, the Assistant Medical Examiner, confirms this statement, adding that there is only one disturbing factor—that a man would not die so soon from lethal alcohol. The question of the cause of death, therefore, we must leave for the moment, since only an autopsy can definitely determine it.

"With a large audience to attend to, the policeman calls for help, officers of the vicinity come in to take charge and subsequently the headquarters men arrive to conduct the immediate investigation. The first important issue that arises is the question of whether the murderer had the opportunity to leave the scene of the crime between

the time it was committed and the time it was discovered. Doyle, the policeman who was first on the scene, immediately ordered the manager to station guards at all exits and both alleys.

"When I arrived, I thought of this point the very first thing and conducted a little investigation of my own. I went around to all the exits and questioned the guards. I discovered that there was a guard at every door of the auditorium during the entire second act, with two exceptions which I shall mention shortly. Now, it had been determined from the testimony of the orangeade boy, Jess Lynch, that the victim was alive not only during the intermission between Act I and Act II—when he saw and talked to Field in the alleyway—but that Field was also in apparently good health ten minutes after the raising of the curtain for Act II. This was when the boy delivered a bottle of ginger ale to Field at the seat in which he was later found dead. Inside the theatre, an usher stationed at the foot of the stairs leading to the balcony swore that no one had either gone up or come down during the second act. This eliminates the possibility that the murderer had access to the balcony.

"The two exceptions I noted a moment ago are the two doors on the extreme left aisle, which should have been guarded but were not because the usherette, Madge O'Connell, was sitting in the audience next to her lover. This presented to my mind the possibility that the murderer might have left by one of these two doors, which were conveniently placed for an escape should the murderer have been so inclined. However, even this possibility was eliminated by the statement of the O'Connell girl, whom I hunted up after she was questioned by dad."

"You talked to her on the sly, did you, you scalawag?" roared Queen, glaring at Ellery.

"I certainly did," chuckled Ellery, "and I discovered the

one important fact that seems pertinent to this phase of the investigation. O'Connell swore that before she left the doors to sit down next to Parson Johnny she stepped on the inside floor-lock that latches them top and bottom. When the commotion began the girl sprang from the Parson's side and finding the doors locked as she had left them, unlatched them while Doyle was attempting to quiet the audience. Unless she was lying—and I don't think she was—this proves that the murderer did not leave by these doors, since at the time the body was found they were still locked from the inside."

"Well, I'll be switched!" growled Queen. "She didn't tell me a thing about that part of it, drat her! Wait till I get my hands on her, the little snip!"

"Please be logical, *M. le Gardien de la Paix*," laughed Ellery. "The reason she didn't tell you about bolting the doors was that you didn't ask her. She felt that she was in enough of an uncomfortable position already.

"At any rate, that statement of hers would seem to dispose of the two side-doors near the murdered man's seat. I will admit that all sorts of possibilities enter into the problem—for example, Madge O'Connell might have been an accomplice. I mention this only as a possibility, and not even as a theory. At any rate, it seems to me that the murderer would not have run the risk of being seen leaving from side doors. Besides, a departure in so unusual a manner and at so unusual a time would have been all the more noticeable especially since few people leave during a second act. And again—the murderer could have no foreknowledge of the O'Connell girl's dereliction in duty—if she were not an accomplice. As the crime was carefully planned—and we must admit that from all indications it was—the murderer would have discarded the side-doors as a means of escape.

"This probe left, I felt, only one other channel of in-

vestigation. That was the main entrance. And here again we received definite testimony from the ticket-taker and the doorman outside to the effect that no one *left* the building during the second act by that route. Except, of course, the harmless orangeade boy.

"All the exits having been guarded or locked, and the alley having been under constant surveillance from 9:35 on by Lynch, Elinor, Johnny Chase—the usher—and after him the police—these being the facts, all my questioning and checking, gentlemen," continued Ellery in a grave tone, "lead to the inevitable conclusion that, from the time the murder was discovered and all the time thereafter while the investigation was going on, *the murderer was in the theatre!*"

A silence followed Ellery's pronouncement. "Incidentally," he added calmly, "it occurred to me when I talked to the ushers to ask if they had seen any one leave his seat after the second act started, and they can't recall anyone changing seats!"

Queen idly took another pinch of snuff. "Nice work—and a very pretty piece of reasoning, my son—but nothing, after all, of a startling or conclusive nature. Granted that the murderer was in the theatre all that time—how could we possibly have laid our hands on him?"

"He didn't say you could," put in Sampson, smiling. "Don't be so sensitive, old boy; nobody's going to report you for negligence in the performance of your duty. From all I've heard to-night you handled the affair well."

Queen grunted. "I'll admit I'm a little peeved at myself for not following up that matter of the doors more thoroughly. But even if it were possible for the murderer to have left directly after the crime, I nevertheless would have had to pursue the inquiry as I did, on the chance that he was still in the theatre."

"But dad—of course!" said Ellery seriously. "You had

so many things to attend to, while all I had to do was stand around and look Socratic."

"How about the people who have come under the eye of the investigation so far?" asked Sampson curiously.

"Well, what about them?" challenged Ellery. "We certainly can draw no definite conclusions from either their conversation or their actions. We have Parson Johnny, a thug, who was there apparently for no other reason than to enjoy a play giving some interesting sidelights on his own profession. Then there is Madge O'Connell, a very doubtful character about whom we can make no decision at this stage of the game. She might be an accomplice—she might be innocent—she might be merely negligent—she might be almost anything. Then there is William Pusak, who found Field. Did you notice the moronic cast of his head? And Benjamin Morgan—here we strike fallow ground in the realm of probability. But what do we know of his actions to-night? True, his story of the letter and the complimentary ticket sounds queer, since any one could have written the letter, even Morgan himself. And we must always remember the public threat against Field; and also the enmity, reason unknown, which has existed between them for two years. And, lastly, we have Miss Frances Ives-Pope. I'm exceedingly sorry I was absent during that interview. The fact remains—and isn't it an interesting one?—that her evening bag was found in the dead man's pocket. Explain that if you can.

"So you see where we are," Ellery continued ruefully. "All we have managed to derive from this evening's entertainment is a plethora of suspicions and a poverty of facts."

"So far, son," said Queen casually, "you have kept on mighty safe ground. But you've forgotten the important matter of the suspiciously vacant seats. Also the rather startling fact that Field's ticket-stub and the only other

stub that could be attributed to the murderer—I refer to the LL30 Left stub found by Flint—that these two stubs do not coincide. That is to say, that the torn edges indicate they were gathered by the ticket-taker at different times!”

“Check,” said Ellery. “But let’s leave that for the moment and get on to the problem of Field’s tophat.”

“The hat—well, what do you think of it?” asked Queen curiously.

“Just this. In the first place, we have fairly established the fact that the hat is not missing through accident. The murdered man was seen by Jess Lynch with the hat in his lap ten minutes after Act II began. Since it is now missing, the only reasonable theory that would explain its absence is that the murderer took it away with him. Now—for the moment, let’s forget the problem of where the hat is now. The immediate conclusion to draw is that the hat was taken away for one of two reasons: first, that it was in some way incriminating in itself, so that if it were left behind it would point to the murderer’s identity. What the nature of this incriminating indication is we cannot even guess at the moment. Second, the hat may have contained something which the murderer wanted. You will say: Why couldn’t he take this mysterious object and leave the hat? Probably, if this supposition is true, because he either had not sufficient time to extract it, or else did not know *how* to extract it and therefore took the hat away with him to examine it at his leisure. Do you agree with me so far?”

The District Attorney nodded slowly. Queen sat still, his eyes vaguely troubled.

“Let us for a moment consider what the hat could possibly have contained,” resumed Ellery, as he vigorously polished his glasses. “Due to its size, shape and cubic content our field of speculation is not a broad one. What

could be hidden in a tophat? The only things that present themselves to my mind are: papers of some sort, jewelry, banknotes, or any other small object of value which could not easily be detected in such a place. Obviously, this problematical object would not be carried merely in the crown of the hat since it would fall out whenever the wearer uncovered his head. We are led to believe therefore that, whatever the object was, it was concealed in the lining of the hat. This immediately narrows our list of possibilities. Solid objects of bulk must be eliminated. A jewel might have been concealed; banknotes or papers might have been concealed. We can, I think, discard the jewel, from what we know of Monte Field. If he was carrying anything of value, it would probably be connected in some way with his profession.

"One point remains to be considered in this preliminary analysis of the missing tophat. And, gentlemen, it may very well become a pivotal consideration before we are through.—It is of paramount importance for us to know whether the murderer knew in advance of his crime that it would be necessary for him to take away Monte Field's tophat. In other words, did the murderer have *foreknowledge* of the hat's significance, whatever it may prove to be? I maintain that the facts prove deductively, as logically as facts *can* prove deductively, that the murderer had no foreknowledge.

"Follow me closely. . . . Since Monte Field's tophat is missing, and since no other tophat has been found in its place, it is an undeniable indication that it was essential that it be taken away. You must agree that, as I pointed out before, the murderer is most plausibly the remover of the hat. Now! Regardless of *why* it had to be taken away, we are faced with two alternatives: one, that the murderer knew in advance that it had to be taken away; or two, that he did *not* know in advance. Let us exhaust

the possibilities in the former case. If he knew in advance, it may be sanely and logically assumed that he would have brought with him to the theatre a hat to replace Field's, rather than leave an obvious clue by the provocative absence of the murdered man's hat. To bring a replacement hat would have been the safe thing to do. The murderer would have had no difficulty in securing a replacement hat, since knowing its importance in advance, he could certainly have armed himself with a further knowledge of Field's head-size, style of tophat, and other minor details. *But there is no replacement hat.* We have every right to expect a replacement hat in a crime so carefully concocted as this one. There being none, our only conclusion can be that the murderer did not know beforehand the importance of Field's hat; otherwise he would assuredly have taken the intelligent precaution of leaving another hat behind. In this way the police would never know that Field's hat had any significance at all.

"Another point in corroboration. Even if the murderer didn't desire, for some dark reason of his own, to leave a replacement hat, he certainly would have arranged to secure what was in the hat by cutting it out. All he had to do was to provide himself in advance with a sharp instrument—a pocket-knife, for example. The *empty* hat, though cut, would not have presented the problem of disposal that the *missing* hat would. Surely the murderer would have preferred this procedure, had he foreknowledge of the hat's contents. But he did not do even this. This, it seems to me, is strong corroborative evidence that he did not know before he came to the Roman Theatre that he would have to take away a hat or its contents. *Quod erat demonstrandum.*"

The District Attorney gazed at Ellery with puckered lips. Inspector Queen seemed sunk in a lethargy. His hand hovered midway between his snuff-box and his nose.

"Just what's the point, Ellery?" inquired Sampson. "Why is it important for you to know that the murderer had no foreknowledge of the hat's significance?"

Ellery smiled. "Merely this. The crime was committed after the beginning of the second act. I want to be sure in my own mind that the murderer, by not knowing in advance of the hat's significance, could not have used the first intermission in any manner whatsoever as an essential element of his plan. . . . Of course, Field's hat may turn up somewhere on the premises, and its discovery would invalidate all these speculations. But—I don't think it will. . . ."

"That analysis of yours might be elementary, boy, but it sounds quite logical to me," said Sampson approvingly. "You should have been a lawyer."

"You can't beat the Queen brains," chuckled the old man suddenly, his face wreathed in a wide smile. "But I'm going to get busy on another tack that ought to jibe somewhere with this puzzle of the hat. You noticed, Ellery, the name of the clothier sewed into Field's coat?"

"No sooner said than done," grinned Ellery. Producing one of the small volumes which he carried in his topcoat pocket, he opened it and pointed to a notation on the fly-leaf. "Browne Bros., gentlemen—no less."

"That's right; and I'll have Velie down there in the morning to check up," said the Inspector. "You must have realized that Field's clothing is of exceptional quality. That evening-suit cost three hundred dollars, if it cost a penny. And Browne Bros. are the artists to charge such fashionable prices. But there's another point in this connection: every stitch of clothing on the dead man's body had the same manufacturer's mark. That's not uncommon with wealthy men; and Browne's made a specialty of outfitting their customers from head to foot. What more probable to assume—"

"Than that Field bought his hats there, too!" exclaimed Sampson, with an air of discovery.

"Exactly, Tacitus," said Queen, grinning. "Velie's job is to check up on this clothing business and if possible secure an exact duplicate of the hat Field wore to-night. I'm mighty anxious to look it over."

Sampson rose with a cough. "I suppose I really ought to get back to bed," he said. "The only reason I came down here was to see that you didn't arrest the Mayor. Boy, that friend of mine was sore! I'll never hear the end of it!"

Queen looked up at him with a quizzical smile. "Before you go, Henry, suppose you tell me just where I stand on this thing. I know that I used a pretty high hand to-night, but you must realize how necessary it was. Are you going to put one of your own men on the case?"

Sampson glared at him. "When did you get the idea I wasn't satisfied with your conduct of the investigation, you old canary bird!" he growled. "I've never checked you up yet, and I'm not going to start now. If you can't bring this thing to a successful conclusion, I certainly don't think any of my men can. My dear Q, go ahead and detain half of New York if you think it's necessary. I'll back you up."

"Thanks, Henry," said Queen. "I just wanted to be sure. And now, since you're so nice about it, watch my smoke!"

He ambled across the room into the anteroom, stuck his head past the doorway into the theatre, and shouted, "Mr. Panzer, will you come here a moment?"

He came back smiling grimly to himself, the swarthy theatre-manager close on his heels.

"Mr. Panzer, meet District Attorney Sampson," said Queen. The two men shook hands. "Now, Mr. Panzer, you've got one more job and you can go home and go to

sleep. I want this theatre shut down so tight a mouse couldn't get into it!"

Panzer grew pale. Sampson shrugged his shoulders, as if to indicate that he washed his hands of the entire affair. Ellery nodded sagely in approval.

"But—but Inspector, just when we're playing to capacity!" groaned the little manager. "Is it absolutely necessary?"

"So necessary, my dear man," answered the Inspector coolly, "that I'm going to have two men here patrolling the premises all the time."

Panzer wrung his hands, looking furtively at Sampson. But the District Attorney was standing with his back to them, examining a print on the wall.

"This is terrible, Inspector!" wailed Panzer. "I'll never hear the end of it from Gordon Davis, the producer. . . . But of course—if you say so, it will be done."

"Heck, man, don't look so blue," said Queen, more kindly. "You'll be getting so much publicity out of this that when the show reopens you'll have to enlarge the theatre. I don't expect to have the theatre shut down more than a few days, anyway. I'll give the necessary orders to my own men outside. After you've transacted your routine business here to-night, just tip off the men I've left and go home. I'll let you know in a few days when you can reopen."

Panzer waggled his head sadly, shook hands all around and left. Sampson immediately whirled on Queen and said, "By the Lord Harry, Q, that's going some! Why do you want the theatre closed? You've milked it dry, haven't you?"

"Well, Henry," said Queen slowly, "the hat hasn't been found. All those people filed out of the theatre and were searched—and each one had just one hat. Doesn't that indicate that the hat we're looking for is still here some-

where? And if it's still here, I'm not giving anybody a chance to come in and take it away. If there's any taking to be done, I'll do it."

Sampson nodded. Ellery was still wearing a worried frown as the three men walked out of the office into the almost deserted orchestra. Here and there a busy figure was stooping over a seat, examining the floor. A few men could be seen darting in and out of the boxes up front. Sergeant Velie stood by the main door, talking in low tones to Piggott and Hagstrom. Detective Flint, superintending a squad of men, was working far to the front of the orchestra. A small group of cleaning-women operated vacuum cleaners tiredly here and there. In one corner, to the rear, a buxom police matron was talking with an elderly woman—the woman Panzer had called Mrs. Phillips.

The three men walked to the main door. While Ellery and Sampson were silently surveying the always depressing scene of an untenanted auditorium, Queen spoke rapidly to Velie, giving orders in an undertone. Finally he turned and said, "Well, gentlemen, that's all for to-night. Let's be going."

On the sidewalk a number of policemen had roped off a large space, behind which a straggling crowd of curiosity-seekers was gaping.

"Even at two o'clock in the morning these night-birds patrol Broadway," grunted Sampson. With a wave of the hand he entered his automobile after the Queens politely refused his offer of a "lift." A crowd of businesslike reporters pushed through the lines and surrounded the two Queens.

"Here, here! What's this, gentlemen?" asked the old man, frowning.

"How about the low-down on to-night's job, Inspector?" asked one of them urgently.

"You'll get all the information you want, boys, from Detective-Sergeant Velie—inside." He smiled as they charged in a body through the glass doors.

Ellery and Richard Queen stood silently on the curb, watching the policemen herd back the crowd. Then the old man said with a sudden wave of weariness, "Come on, son, let's walk part of the way home."

PART TWO

" To illustrate: Once young Jean C—— came to me after a month of diligent investigation on a difficult assignment. He wore a forlorn expression. Without a word he handed me a slip of official paper. I read it in surprise. It was his resignation.

" 'Here, Jean!' I cried. 'What is the meaning of this?'

" 'I have failed, M. Brillon,' he muttered. 'A month's work gone to the devil. I have been on the wrong track. It is a disgrace.'

" 'Jean, my friend,' said I solemnly, 'this for your resignation.' Wherewith I tore it to bits before his astonished eyes. 'Go now,' I admonished him, 'and begin from the beginning. For remember always the maxim: He who would know right must first know wrong!'

—From REMINISCENCES OF A PREFECT,
By Auguste Brillon.

CHAPTER VIII

IN WHICH THE QUEENS MEET MR. FIELD'S VERY BEST FRIEND

THE Queens' apartment on West 87th Street was a man's domicile from the pipe-rack over the hearth to the shining sabres on the wall. They lived on the top floor of a three-family brownstone house, a relic of late Victorian times. You walked up the heavily-carpeted stairs through seemingly endless halls of dismal rectitude. When you were quite convinced that only mummified souls could inhabit such a dreary place, you came upon the huge oaken door marked, "The Queens"—a motto lettered neatly and framed. Then Djuna grinned at you from behind a crack and you entered a new world.

More than one individual, exalted in his own little niche, had willingly climbed the uninviting staircases to find sanctuary in this haven. More than one card bearing a famous name had been blithely carried by Djuna through the foyer into the living-room.

The foyer was Ellery's inspiration, if the truth were told. It was so small and so narrow that its walls appeared unnaturally towering. With a humorous severity one wall had been completely covered by a tapestry depicting the chase—a most appropriate appurtenance to this medieval chamber. Both Queens detested it heartily, preserving it only because it had been presented to them with regal gratitude by the Duke of —, that impulsive gentleman whose son Richard Queen had saved from a noisome scandal, the details of which have never been made public. Beneath the tapestry stood a heavy mission table, display-

ing a parchment lamp and a pair of bronze book-ends bounding a three-volume set of the Arabian Nights' Entertainment.

Two mission chairs and a small rug completed the foyer.

When you walked through this oppressive place, always gloomy and almost always hideous, you were ready for anything except the perfect cheeriness of the large room beyond. This study in contrast was Ellery's private jest, for if it were not for him the old man would long since have thrown the foyer and its furnishings into some dark limbo.

The living-room was lined on three sides with a bristling and leathern-reeking series of bookcases, rising tier upon tier to the high ceiling. On the fourth wall was a huge natural fireplace, with a solid oak beam as a mantel and gleaming iron-work spacing the grate. Above the fireplace were the famous crossed sabres, a gift from the old fencing-master of Nuremburg with whom Richard had lived in his younger days during his studies in Germany. Lamps winked and gleamed all over the great sprawling room; easy-chairs, armchairs, low divans, foot-stools, bright-colored leather cushions, were everywhere. In a word, it was the most comfortable room two intellectual gentlemen of luxurious tastes could devise for their living-quarters. And where such a place might after a time have become stale through sheer variety, the bustling person of Djuna, man-of-all-work, general factotum, errand boy, valet and mascot prevented such a dénouement.

Djuna had been picked up by Richard Queen during the period of Ellery's studies at college, when the old man was very much alone. This cheerful young man, nineteen years old, an orphan for as long as he could remember, ecstatically unaware of the necessity for a surname—slim and small, nervous and joyous, bubbling over with spirit and yet as quiet as a mouse when the occasion demanded—

this Djuna, then, worshiped old Richard in much the same fashion as the ancient Alaskans bowed down to their totem-poles. Between him and Ellery, too, there was a shy kinship which rarely found expression except in the boy's passionate service. He slept in a small room beyond the bedrooms used by father and son and, according to Richard's own chuckling expression, "could hear a flea singing to its mate in the middle of the night."

On the morning after the eventful night of Monte Field's murder, Djuna was laying the cloth for breakfast when the telephone bell rang. The boy, accustomed to early morning calls, lifted the receiver:

"This is Inspector Queen's man Djuna talking. Who is calling, please?"

"Oh, it is, is it?" growled a bass voice over the wire. "Well, you son of a Gypsy policeman, wake the Inspector for me and be quick about it!"

"Inspector Queen may not be disturbed, sir, unless his man Djuna knows who's calling." Djuna, who knew Sergeant Velie's voice especially well, grinned and stuck his tongue in his cheek.

A slim hand firmly grasped Djuna's neck and propelled him half-way across the room. The Inspector, fully dressed, his nostrils quivering appreciatively with his morning's first ration of snuff, said into the mouthpiece, "Don't mind Djuna, Thomas. What's up? This is Queen talking."

"Oh, that you, Inspector? I wouldn't have buzzed you so early in the morning except that Ritter just phoned from Monte Field's apartment. Got an interesting report," rumbled Velie.

"Well, well!" chuckled the Inspector. "So our friend Ritter's bagged someone, eh? Who is it, Thomas?"

"You guessed it, sir," came Velie's unmoved voice. "He said he's got a lady down there in an embarrassing state of

deshabille and if he stays alone with her much longer his wife will divorce him. Orders, sir?"

Queen laughed heartily. "Sure enough, Thomas. Send a couple of men down there right away to chaperon him. I'll be there myself in two shakes of a lamb's tail—which is to say, as soon as I can drag Ellery out of bed."

He hung up, grinning. "Djuna!" he shouted. The boy's head popped out from behind the kitchenette door immediately. "Hurry up with the eggs and coffee, son!" The Inspector turned toward the bedroom to find Ellery, collarless but unmistakably on the road to dress, confronting him with an air of absorption.

"So you're really up?" grumbled the Inspector, easing himself into an armchair. "I thought I'd have to drag you out of bed, you sluggard!"

"You may rest easy," said Ellery absently. "I most certainly am up, and I am going to stay up. And as soon as Djuna replenishes the inner man I'll be off and out of your way." He lounged into the bedroom, reappearing a moment later brandishing his collar and tie.

"Here! Where d'ye think you're going, young man?" roared Queen, starting up.

"Down to my book-shop, Inspector darling," replied Ellery judicially. "You don't think I'm going to allow that Falconer first-edition to get away from me? Really—it may still be there, you know."

"Falconer fiddle-sticks," said his father grimly. "You started something and you're going to help finish it. Here—Djuna—where in time is that kid?"

Djuna stepped briskly into the room balancing a tray in one hand and a pitcher of milk in the other. In a twinkling he had the table ready, the coffee bubbling, the toast browned; and father and son hurried through their breakfast without a word.

"Now," remarked Ellery, setting down his empty cup,

"now that I've finished this Arcadian repast, tell me where the fire is."

"Get your hat and coat on and stop asking pointless questions, son of my grief," growled Queen. In three minutes they were on the sidewalk hailing a taxicab.

The cab drew up before a monumental apartment building. Lounging on the sidewalk, a cigarette drooping from his lips, was Detective Piggott. The Inspector winked and trotted into the lobby. He and Ellery were whisked up to the fourth floor where Detective Hagstrom greeted them, pointing to an apartment door numbered 4-D. Ellery, leaning forward to catch the inscription on the nameplate, was about to turn on his father with an amused expostulation when the door swung open at Queen's imperious ring and the broad flushed face of Ritter peered out at them.

"Morning, Inspector," the detective mumbled, holding the door open. "I'm glad you've come, sir."

Queen and Ellery marched inside. They stood in a small foyer, profusely furnished. Directly in their line of vision was a living-room, and beyond that a closed door. A frilled feminine slipper and a slim ankle were visible at the edge of the door.

The Inspector stepped forward, changed his mind and quickly opening the hall door called to Hagstrom, who was sauntering about outside. The detective ran up.

"Come inside here," said Queen sharply. "Got a job for you."

With Ellery and the two plainclothes men following at his heels, he strode into the living-room.

A woman of mature beauty, a trifle worn, the pastiness of a ruined complexion apparent beneath heavily applied rouge, sprang to her feet. She was dressed in a flowing flimsy *negligée* and her hair was tousled. She nervously crushed a cigarette underfoot.

"Are you the big cheese around here?" she yelled in a strident fury to Queen. He stood stock still and examined her impersonally. "Then what the hell do you mean by sending one o' your flat-foots to keep me locked up all night, hey?"

She jumped forward as if to come to grips with the old man. Ritter lumbered swiftly toward her and squeezed her arm. "Here you," he growled, "shut up until you're spoken to."

She glared at him. Then with a tigerish twist she was out of his grasp and in a chair, panting, wild-eyed.

Arms akimbo, the Inspector stood looking her up and down with unconcealed distaste. Ellery had glanced at the woman briefly and begun to potter about the room, peering at the wall-hangings and Japanese prints, picking up a book from an end-table, poking his head into dark corners.

Queen motioned to Hagstrom. "Take this lady into the next room and keep her company for a while," he said. The detective unceremoniously hustled the woman to her feet. She tossed her head defiantly and marched into the next room, Hagstrom following.

"Now, Ritter, my boy," sighed the old man, sinking into an easy-chair, "tell me what happened."

Ritter answered stiffly. His eyes were strained, blood-shot. "I followed out your orders last night to the dot. I beat it down here in a police car, left it on the corner because I didn't know but what somebody might be keeping a lookout, and strolled up to this apartment. Everything was quiet—and I hadn't noticed any lights either, because before I went in I beat it down to the court and looked up at the back windows of the apartment. So I gave 'em a nice short ring on the bell and waited.

"No answer," continued Ritter, with a tightening of his big jaw. "I buzzed again—this time longer and louder. This time I got results. I heard the latch on the inside

rattle and this woman yodels, 'That you, honey? Where's your key?' Aha—thinks I—Mr. Field's lady-friend! So I shoved my foot in the door and grabbed her before she knew what was what. Well, sir, I got a surprise. Sort of expected," he grinned sheepishly, "sort of expected to find the woman dressed, but all I grabbed was a thin piece o' silk night-gown. I guess I must have blushed. . . ."

"Ah, the opportunities of our good minions of the law!" murmured Ellery, head bent over a small lacquered vase.

"Anyway—" continued the detective, "I got my hands on her and she yelped—plenty. Hustled her into the living-room here where she'd put on the light, and took a good look at her. She was scared blue but she was kind of plucky, too, because she began to cuss me and she wanted to know who in hell I was, what I was tryin' to do in a woman's apartment at night, and all that sort of stuff. I flashed my badge. And Inspector, that hefty Sheba—the minute she sees the badge, she shuts up tight like a bluepoint and won't answer a question I ask her!"

"Why was that?" The old man's eyes roved from floor to ceiling as he looked over the appointments of the room.

"Hard to tell, Inspector," said Ritter. "First she seemed scared, but when she saw my badge she bucked up wonderful. And the longer I was here the more brazen she became."

"You didn't tell her about Field, did you?" queried the Inspector, in a sharp, low tone.

Ritter gave his superior a reproachful glance. "Not a peep out o' me, sir," he said. "Well, when I saw it was no go tryin' to get anything out of her—all she'd yell was, 'Wait till Monte gets home, you bozo!'—I took a look at the bedroom. Nobody there, so I shoved her inside, kept the door open and the light on and stayed all night. She climbed into bed after a while and I guess she went to sleep. At about seven this morning she popped out and

started to yell all over again. Seemed to think that Field had been grabbed by headquarters. Insisted on having a newspaper. I told her nothin' doin' and then phoned the office. Not another thing happened since."

"I say, dad!" exclaimed Ellery suddenly, from a corner of the room. "What do you think our legal friend reads—you'll never guess. 'How to Tell Character from Hand-writing'!"

The Inspector grunted as he rose. "Stop fiddling with those eternal books," he said, "and come along."

He flung open the bedroom door. The woman was sitting cross-legged on the bed, an ornate affair of a bastard French period-style, canopied and draped from ceiling to floor with heavy damask curtains. Hagstrom leaned stolidly against the window.

Queen looked quickly about. He turned to Ritter. "Was that bed mussed up when you came in here last night—did it look as if it had been slept in?" he whispered aside.

Ritter nodded. "All right, then, Ritter," said Queen in a genial tone. "Go home and get some rest. You deserve it. And send up Piggott on your way out." The detective touched his hat and departed.

Queen turned on the woman. He walked to the bed and sat down beside her, studying her half-averted face. She lit a cigarette defiantly.

"I am Inspector Queen of the police, my dear," announced the old man mildly. "I warn you that any attempt to keep a stubborn silence or lie to me will only get you into a heap of trouble. But there! Of course you understand."

She jerked away. "I'm not answering any questions, Mr. Inspector, until I know what right you have to ask 'em. I haven't done anything wrong and my slate's clean. You can put that in your pipe and smoke it!"

The Inspector took a pinch of snuff, as if the woman's reference to the vile weed had reminded him of his favorite vice. He said: "That's fair enough," in dulcet tones. "Here you are, a lonely woman suddenly tumbled out of bed in the middle of the night—you *were* in bed, weren't you—?"

"Sure I was," she flashed instantly, then bit her lip.

"—And confronted by a policeman. . . . I don't wonder you were frightened, my dear."

"I was not!" she said shrilly.

"We'll not argue about it," rejoined the old man benevolently. "But certainly you have no objection to telling me your name?"

"I don't know why I should, but I can't see any harm in it," retorted the woman. "My name is Angela Russo—Mrs. Angela Russo—and I'm, well, I'm engaged to Mr. Field."

"I see," said Queen gravely. "Mrs. Angela Russo and you are engaged to Mr. Field. Very good! And what were you doing in these rooms last night, Mrs. Angela Russo?"

"None of your business!" she said coolly. "You'd better let me go now—I haven't done a thing out of the way. You've got no right to jabber at me, old boy!"

Ellery, in a corner peering out of the window, smiled. The Inspector leaned over and took the woman's hand gently.

"My dear Mrs. Russo," he said, "believe me—there is every reason in the world why we should be anxious to know what you were doing here last night. Come now—tell me."

"I won't open my mouth till I know what you've done with Monte!" she cried, shaking off his hand. "If you've got him, why are you pestering me? I don't know anything."

"Mr. Field is in a very safe place at the moment," snapped the Inspector, rising. "I've given you plenty of rope, madam. Monte Field is dead."

"Monte—Field—is—" The woman's lips moved mechanically. She leaped to her feet, clutching the *negligée* to her plump figure, staring at Queen's impassive face.

She laughed shortly and threw herself back on the bed. "Go on—you're taking me for a ride," she jeered.

"I'm not accustomed to joking about death," returned the old man with a little smile. "I assure you that you may take my word for it—Monte Field is dead." She was staring up at him, her lips moving soundlessly. "And what is more, Mrs. Russo, he has been murdered. Perhaps now you'll deign to answer my questions. Where were you at a quarter to ten last night?" he whispered in her ear, his face close to hers.

Mrs. Russo relaxed limply on the bed, a dawning fright in her large eyes. She gaped at the Inspector, found little comfort in his face and with a cry whirled to sob into the rumpled pillow. Queen stepped back and spoke in a low tone to Piggott, who had come into the room a moment before. The woman's heaving sobs subsided suddenly. She sat up, dabbing her face with a lace handkerchief. Her eyes were strangely bright.

"I get you now," she said in a quiet voice. "I was right here in this apartment at a quarter to ten last night."

"Can you prove that, Mrs. Russo?" asked Queen, fingering his snuff-box.

"I can't prove anything and I don't have to," she returned dully. "But if you're looking for an alibi, the doorman downstairs must have seen me come into the building at about nine-thirty."

"We can easily check that up," admitted Queen. "Tell me—why did you come here last night at all?"

"I had an appointment with Monte," she explained life-

lessly. "He called me up at my own place yesterday afternoon and we made a date for last night. He told me he'd be out on business until about ten o'clock, and I was to wait here for him. I come up"—she paused and continued brazenly—"I come up quite often like that. We generally have a little 'time' and spend the evening together. Being engaged—you know."

"Ummm. I see, I see." The Inspector cleared his throat in some embarrassment. "And then, when he didn't come on time—?"

"I thought he might've been detained longer than he'd figured. So I—well, I felt tired and took a little nap."

"Very good," said Queen quickly. "Did he tell you where he was going, or the nature of his business?"

"No."

"I should be greatly obliged to you, Mrs. Russo," said the Inspector carefully, "if you would tell me what Mr. Field's attitude was toward theatre-going."

The woman looked at him curiously. She seemed to be recovering her spirits. "Didn't go very often," she snapped. "Why?"

The Inspector beamed. "Now, that's a question, isn't it?" he asked. He motioned to Hagstrom, who pulled a notebook out of his pocket.

"Could you give me a list of Mr. Field's personal friends?" resumed Queen. "And any business acquaintances you might know of?"

Mrs. Russo put her hands behind her head, coquettishly. "To tell the truth," she said sweetly, "I don't know any. I met Monte about six months ago at a masque-ball in the Village. We've kept our engagement sort of quiet, you see. In fact, I've never met his friends at all. . . . I don't think," she confided, "I don't think Monte had many friends. And of course I don't know a thing about his business associates."

"What was Field's financial condition, Mrs. Russo?"

"Trust a woman to know those things!" she retorted, completely restored to her flippant manner. "Monte was always a good spender. Never seemed to run out of cash. He's spent five hundred a night on me many a time. That was Monte—a damned good sport. Tough luck for him!—poor darling." She wiped a tear from her eye, sniffing hastily.

"But—his bank account?" pursued the Inspector firmly.

Mrs. Russo smiled. She seemed to possess an inexhaustible fund of shifting emotions. "Never got nosey," she said. "As long as Monte was treating me square it wasn't any of my business. At least," she added, "he wouldn't tell me, so what did I care?"

"Where were you, Mrs. Russo," came Ellery's indifferent tones, "*before* nine-thirty last night?"

She turned in surprise at the new voice. They measured each other carefully, and something like warmth crept into her eyes. "I don't know who you are, mister, but if you want to find out ask the lovers in Central Park. I was taking a little stroll in the Park—all by my lonesome—from about half-past seven until the time I reached here."

"How fortunate!" murmured Ellery. The Inspector hastily went to the door, crooking his finger at the other three men. "We'll leave you now to dress, Mrs. Russo. That will be all for the present." She watched quizzically as they filed out. Queen, last, shut the door after a fatherly glance at her face.

In the living-room the four men proceeded to make a hurried but thorough search. At the Inspector's command Hagstrom and Piggott went through the drawers of a carved desk in one corner of the room. Ellery was interestedly riffling the pages of the book on character through handwriting. Queen prowled restlessly about, poking his head into a clothes-closet just inside the room,

off the foyer. This was a commodious storage compartment for clothes—assorted topcoats, overcoats, capes and the like hung from a rack. The Inspector rifled the pockets. A few miscellaneous articles—handkerchiefs, keys, old personal letters, wallets—came to light. These he put to one side. A top shelf held several hats.

“Ellery—hats,” he grunted.

Ellery quickly crossed the room, stuffing into his pocket the book he had been reading. His father pointed out the hats meaningly; together they reached up to examine them. There were four—a discolored Panama, two fedoras, one gray and one brown, and a derby. All bore the imprint of Browne Bros.

The two men turned the hats over in their hands. Both noticed immediately that three of them had no linings—the Panama and the two fedoras. The fourth hat, an excellent derby, Queen examined critically. He felt the lining, turned down the leather sweat-band, then shook his head.

“To tell the truth, Ellery,” he said slowly, “I’ll be switched if I know why I should expect to find clues in these hats. We know that Field wore a tophat last night and obviously it would be impossible for that hat to be in these rooms. According to our findings the murderer was still in the theatre when we arrived. Ritter was down here by eleven o’clock. The hat therefore *couldn’t* have been brought to this place. For that matter, what earthly reason would the murderer have for such an action, even if it were physically possible for him to do it? He must have realized that we would search Field’s apartment at once. No, I guess I’m feeling a little off-color, Ellery. There’s nothing to be squeezed out of these hats.” He threw the derby back onto the shelf disgustedly.

Ellery stood thoughtful and unsmiling. “You’re right enough, dad; these hats mean nothing. But I have the

strangest feeling. . . . By the way!" He straightened up and took off his pince-nez. "Did it occur to you last night that something else belonging to Field might have been missing besides the hat?"

"I wish they were all as easy to answer as that," said Queen grimly. "Certainly—a walking-stick. But what could I do about that? Working on the premise that Field brought one with him—it would have been simple enough for some one who had entered the theatre without a walking-stick to leave the theatre with Field's. And how could we stop him or identify the stick? So I didn't even bother thinking about it. And if it's still on the Roman premises, Ellery, it will keep—no fear about that."

Ellery chuckled. "I should be able to quote Shelley or Wordsworth at this point," he said, "in proof of my admiration for your mental prowess. But I can't think of a more poetical phrase than 'You've put one over on me.' Because I didn't think of it until just now. But here's the point: there is no cane of any kind in the closet. A man like Field, had he possessed a swanky halberd to go with evening dress, would most certainly have owned other sticks to match other costumes. That fact—unless we find sticks in the bedroom closet, which I doubt, since all the overclothes seem to be here—that fact, therefore, eliminates the possibility that Field had a stick with him last night. *Ergo*—we may forget all about it."

"Good enough, El," returned the Inspector absently. "I hadn't thought of that. Well—let's see how the boys are getting on."

They walked across the room to where Hagstrom and Piggott were rifling the desk. A small pile of papers and notes had accumulated on the lid.

"Find anything interesting?" asked Queen.

"Not a thing of value that I can see, Inspector," answered Piggott. "Just the usual stuff—some letters, chiefly

from this Russo woman, and pretty hot too!—a lot of bills and receipts and things like that. Don't think you'll find anything here."

Queen went through the papers. "No, nothing much," he admitted. "Well, let's get on." They restored the papers to the desk. Piggott and Hagstrom rapidly searched the room. They tapped furniture, poked beneath cushions, picked up the rug—a thorough, workmanlike job. As Queen and Ellery stood silently watching, the bedroom door opened. Mrs. Russo appeared, saucily appareled in a brown walking-suit and toque. She paused at the door, surveying the scene with wide, innocent eyes. The two detectives proceeded with their search without looking up.

"What are they doing, Inspector?" she inquired in a languid tone. "Looking for pretty-pretties?" But her eyes were keen and interested.

"That was remarkably rapid dressing for a female, Mrs. Russo," said the Inspector admiringly. "Going home?"

Her glance darted at him. "Sure thing," she answered, looking away.

"And you live at—?"

She gave an address on MacDougal Street in Greenwich Village.

"Thank you," said Queen courteously, making a note. She began to walk across the room. "Oh, Mrs. Russo!" She turned. "Before you go—perhaps you could tell us something about Mr. Field's convivial habits. Was he, now, what you would call a heavy drinker?"

She laughed merrily. "Is that all?" she said. "Yes and no. I've seen Monte drink half a night and be sober as a—as a parson. And then I've seen him at other times when he was pickled silly on a couple of tots. It all depended—don't you know?" She laughed again.

"Well, many of us are that way," murmured the Inspector. "I don't want you to abuse any confidences, Mrs.

Russo—but perhaps you know the source of his liquor supply?”

She stopped laughing instantly, her face reflecting an innocent indignation. “What do you think I am, anyway?” she demanded. “I don’t know, but even if I did I wouldn’t tell. There’s many a hard-working bootlegger who’s head and shoulders above the guys who try to run ’em in, believe me!”

“The way of all flesh, Mrs. Russo,” said Queen soothingly. “Nevertheless, my dear,” he continued softly, “I’m sure that if I need that information eventually, you will enlighten me. Eh?” There was a silence. “I think that will be all, then, Mrs. Russo. Just stay in town, won’t you? We may require your testimony soon.”

“Well—so long,” she said, tossing her head. She marched out of the room to the foyer.

“Mrs. Russo!” called Queen suddenly, in a sharp tone. She turned with her gloved hand on the front-door knob, the smile dying from her lips. “What’s Ben Morgan been doing since he and Field dissolved partnership—do you know?”

Her reply came after a split-second of hesitation. “Who’s he?” she asked, her forehead wrinkled into a frown.

Queen stood squarely on the rug. He said sadly, “Never mind. Good day,” and turned his back on her. The door slammed. A moment later Hagstrom strolled out, leaving Piggott, Queen and Ellery in the apartment.

The three men, as if inspired by a single thought, ran into the bedroom. It was apparently as they had left it. The bed was disordered and Mrs. Russo’s nightgown and *negligée* were lying on the floor. Queen opened the door of the bedroom clothes-closet. “Whew!” said Ellery. “This chap had a quiet taste in clothes, didn’t he? Sort of Mulberry Street Beau Brummell.” They ransacked the closet with no result. Ellery craned his neck at the

shelf above. "No hats—no canes; that settles *that!*" he murmured with an air of satisfaction. Piggott, who had disappeared into a small kitchen, returned staggering under the burden of a half-empty case of liquor-bottles.

Ellery and his father bent over the case. The Inspector removed a cork gingerly, sniffed the contents, then handed the bottle to Piggott, who followed his superior's example critically.

"Looks and smells okay," said the detective. "But I'd hate to take a chance tasting this stuff—after last night."

"You're perfectly justified in your caution," chuckled Ellery. "But if you should change your mind and decide to invoke the spirit of Bacchus, Piggott, let me suggest this prayer: O wine, if thou hast no name to be known by, let us call thee Death." *

"I'll have the firewater analyzed," growled Queen. "Scotch and rye mixed, and the labels look like the real thing. But then you never can tell. . . ." Ellery suddenly grasped his father's arm, leaning forward tensely. The three men stiffened.

A barely audible scratching came to their ears, proceeding from the foyer.

"Sounds as if somebody is using a key on the door," whispered Queen. "Duck out, Piggott—jump whoever it is as soon as he gets inside!"

Piggott darted through the living-room into the foyer. Queen and Ellery waited in the bedroom, concealed from view.

There was utter silence now except for the scraping on the outer door. The newcomer seemed to be having difficulty with the key. Suddenly the rasp of the lock-tumblers falling back was heard and an instant later the door swung open. It slammed shut almost immediately.

* Ellery Queen was here probably paraphrasing the Shakespearian quotation: "O thou invisible spirit of wine, if thou hast no name to be known by, let us call thee devil."

A muffled cry, a hoarse bull-like voice, Piggott's half-strangled oath, the frenzied shuffling of feet—and Ellery and his father were speeding across the living-room to the foyer.

Piggott was struggling in the arms of a burly, powerful man dressed in black. A suit-case lay on the floor to one side, as if it had been thrown there during the tussle. A newspaper was fluttering through the air, settling on the parquet just as Ellery reached the cursing men.

It took the combined efforts of the three to subdue their visitor. Finally, panting heavily, he lay on the floor, Piggott's arm jammed tightly across his chest.

The Inspector bent down, gazed curiously into the man's red, angry features and said softly, "And who are you, mister?"

CHAPTER IX

IN WHICH THE MYSTERIOUS MR. MICHAELS APPEARS

THE intruder rose awkwardly to his feet. He was a tall, ponderous man with solemn features and blank eyes. There was nothing distinguished in either his appearance or his manner. If anything unusual could be said of him at all, it was that both his appearance and manner were so unremarkable. It seemed as if, whoever he was or whatever his occupation, he had made a deliberate effort to efface all marks of personality.

"Just what's the idea of the strong-arm stuff?" he said in a bass voice. But even his tones were flat and colorless.

Queen turned to Piggott. "What happened?" he demanded, with a pretense of severity.

"I stood behind the door, Inspector," gasped Piggott, still winded, "and when this wildcat stepped in I touched him on the arm. He jumped me like a trainload o' tigers, he did. Pushed me in the face—he's got a wallop, Inspector. . . . Tried to get out the door again."

Queen nodded judicially. The newcomer said mildly, "That's a lie, sir. He jumped me and I fought back."

"Here, here!" murmured Queen. "This will never do. . . ."

The door swung open suddenly and Detective Johnson stood on the threshold. He took the Inspector to one side. "Velie sent me down the last minute on the chance you might need me, Inspector. . . . And as I was coming up I saw that chap there. Didn't know but what he might be snooping around, so I followed him up." Queen nodded vigorously. "Glad you came—I can use you," he mut-

tered and, motioning to the others, he led the way into the living-room.

"Now, my man," he said curtly to the big intruder, "the show is over. Who are you and what are you doing here?"

"My name is Charles Michaels—sir. I am Mr. Monte Field's valet." The Inspector's eyes narrowed. The man's entire demeanor had in some intangible manner changed. His face was blank, as before, and his attitude seemed in no way different. Yet the old man sensed a metamorphosis; he glanced quickly at Ellery and saw a confirmation of his own thought in his son's eyes.

"Is that so?" inquired the Inspector steadily. "Valet, eh? And where are you going at this hour of the morning with that traveling-bag?" He jerked his hand toward the suit-case, a cheap black affair, which Piggott had picked up in the foyer and carried into the living-room. Ellery suddenly strolled away in the direction of the foyer. He bent over to pick up something.

"Sir?" Michaels seemed upset by the question. "That's mine, sir," he confided. "I was just going away this morning on my vacation and I'd arranged with Mr. Field to come here for my salary-check before I left."

The old man's eyes sparkled. He had it! Michaels's expression and general bearing had remained unchanged; but his voice and enunciation were markedly different.

"So you arranged to get your check from Mr. Field this morning?" murmured the Inspector. "That's mighty funny now, come to think of it."

Michaels permitted a fleeting amazement to scud across his features. "Why—why, where is Mr. Field?" he asked.

"'Massa's in de cold, cold ground,'" chuckled Ellery, from the foyer. He stepped back into the living-room, flourishing the newspaper which Michaels had dropped during the fracas with Piggott. "Really, now, old chap, that's

a bit thick, you know. Here is the morning paper you brought in with you. And the first thing I see as I pick it up is the nice black headline describing Mr. Field's little accident. Smear'd over the entire front-page. And—er, you failed to see the story?"

Michaels stared stonily at Ellery and the paper. But his eyes fell as he mumbled, "I didn't get the opportunity of reading the paper this morning, sir. What has happened to Mr. Field?"

The Inspector snorted. "Field's been killed, Michaels, and you knew it all the time."

"But I didn't, I tell you, sir," objected the valet respectfully.

"Stop lying!" rapped Queen. "Tell us why you're here or you'll get plenty of opportunity to talk behind bars!"

Michaels regarded the old man patiently. "I've told you the truth, sir," he said. "Mr. Field told me yesterday that I was to come here this morning for my check. That's all I know."

"You were to meet him here?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then why did you forget to ring the bell? Used a key as if you didn't expect to find any one here, my man," said Queen.

"The bell?" The valet opened his eyes wide. "I always use my key, sir. Never disturb Mr. Field if I can help it."

"Why didn't Field give you a check yesterday?" barked the Inspector.

"He didn't have his check-book handy, I think, sir."

Queen's lip curled. "You haven't even a fertile imagination, Michaels. At what time did you last see him yesterday?"

"At about seven o'clock, sir," said Michaels promptly. "I don't live here at the apartment. It's too small and Mr. Field likes—liked privacy. I generally come early in

the morning to make breakfast for him and prepare his bath and lay out his clothes. Then when he's gone to the office I clean up a bit and the rest of the day is my own until dinner-time. I return about five, prepare dinner unless I've heard from Mr. Field during the day that he is dining out, and get his dinner or evening clothes ready. Then I am through for the night. . . . Yesterday after I laid out his things he told me about the check.

"Not an especially fatiguing itinerary," murmured Ellery. "And what things did you lay out last evening, Michaels?"

The man faced Ellery respectfully. "There was his underwear, sir, and his socks, his evening shoes, stiff shirt, studs, collar, white tie, full evening dress, cape, hat—"

"Ah, yes—his hat," interrupted Queen. "And what kind of hat was it, Michaels?"

"His regular tophat, sir," answered Michaels. "He had only one, and a very expensive one it was, too," he added warmly. "Browne Bros., I think."

Queen drummed lazily on the arm of his chair. "Tell me, Michaels," he said, "what did you do last night after you left here—that is, after seven o'clock?"

"I went home, sir. I had my bag to pack and I was rather fatigued. I went right to sleep after I'd had a bite to eat—it must have been near nine-thirty when I climbed into bed, sir," he added innocently.

"Where do you live?" Michaels gave a number on East 146th Street, in the Bronx section. "I see. . . . Did Field have any regular visitors here?" went on the Inspector.

Michaels frowned politely. "That's hard for me to say, sir. Mr. Field wasn't what you would call a friendly person. But then I wasn't here evenings, so I can't say who came after I left. But—"

"Yes?"

"There was a lady, sir. . . ." Michaels hesitated primly.

"I dislike mentioning names under the circumstances—"

"Her name?" said Queen wearily.

"Well, sir—it isn't sort of right—Russo. Mrs. Angela Russo, her name is," answered Michaels.

"How long did Mr. Field know this Mrs. Russo?"

"Several months, sir. I think he met her at a party in Greenwich Village somewhere."

"I see. And they were engaged, perhaps?"

Michaels seemed embarrassed. "You might call it that, sir, although it was a little less formal. . . ."

Silence. "How long have you been in Monte Field's employ, Michaels?" pursued the Inspector.

"Three years next month."

Queen switched to a new line of questioning. He asked Michaels about Field's addiction to theatre-going, his financial condition and his drinking habits. In these particulars Michaels corroborated Mrs. Russo's statements. Nothing of a fresh nature was disclosed.

"A few moments ago you said you have been working for Field a matter of three years," continued Queen, settling back in his chair. "How did you get the job?"

Michaels did not answer immediately. "I followed up an ad in the papers, sir."

"Quite so. . . . If you have been in Field's service for three years, Michaels, you should know Benjamin Morgan."

Michaels permitted a proper smile to cross his lips. "Certainly I know Mr. Benjamin Morgan," he said heartily. "And a very fine gentleman he is, too, sir. He was Mr. Field's partner, you know, in their law business. But then they separated about two years ago and I haven't seen much of Mr. Morgan since."

"Did you see him often before the split?"

"No, sir," returned the burly valet, in a tone which implied regret. "Mr. Field was not Mr. Morgan's—ah—type, and they didn't mix socially. Oh, I remember seeing Mr.

Morgan in this apartment three or four times, but only when it was a matter of most urgent business. Even then I couldn't say much about it since I didn't stay all evening. . . . Of course, he hasn't been here, so far as I know, since they broke up the firm."

Queen smiled for the first time during the conversation. "Thank you for your frankness, Michaels. . . . I'm going to be an old gossip—do you recall any unpleasantness about the time they dissolved?"

"Oh, no, sir!" protested Michaels. "I never heard of a quarrel or anything like that. In fact, Mr. Field told me immediately after the dissolution that he and Mr. Morgan would remain friends—very good friends, he said."

Michaels turned with his politely blank expression at a touch on his arm. He found himself face to face with Ellery. "Yes, sir?" he asked respectfully.

"Michaels, dear man," said Ellery with severity, "I detest raking up old coals, by why haven't you told the Inspector about that time you were in jail?"

As if he had stepped on an exposed live-wire Michaels' body stiffened and grew still. The ruddy color drained out of his face. He stared open-mouthed, aplomb swept away, into Ellery's smiling eyes.

"Why—why—how did you find that out?" gasped the valet, his speech less soft and polished. Queen appraised his son with approval. Piggott and Johnson moved closer to the trembling man.

Ellery lit a cigarette. "I didn't know it at all," he said cheerfully. "That is, not until you told me. It would pay you to cultivate the Delphic oracles, Michaels."

Michaels' face was the color of dead ashes. He turned, shaking, toward Queen. "You—you didn't ask me about that, sir," he said weakly. Nevertheless his tone had again become taut and blank. "Besides, a man doesn't like to tell things like that to the police. . . ."

"Where did you do time, Michaels?" asked the Inspector in a kindly voice.

"Elmira Reformatory, sir," muttered Michaels. "It was my first offense—I was up against it, starving, stole some money. . . . I got a short stretch, sir."

Queen rose. "Well, Michaels, of course you understand that you are not exactly a free agent at present. You may go home and look for another job if you want to, but stay at your present lodgings and be ready for a call at any time. . . . Just a moment, before you go." He strode over to the black suit-case and snapped it open. A jumbled mass of clothing—a dark suit, shirts, ties, socks—some clean, some dirty—was revealed. Queen rummaged swiftly through the bag, closed it and handed it to Michaels, who was standing to one side with an expression of sorrowful patience.

"Seems to me you were taking mighty few duds with you, Michaels," remarked Queen, smiling. "It's too bad that you've been done out of your vacation. Well! That's the way life is!" Michaels murmured a low good-by, picked up the bag and departed. A moment later Pig-gott strolled out of the apartment.

Ellery threw back his head and laughed delightedly. "What a mannerly beggar! Lying in his teeth, pater. . . . And what did he want here, do you think?"

"He came to get something, of course," mused the Inspector. "And that means there's something here of importance that we have apparently overlooked. . . ."

He grew thoughtful. The telephone bell rang.

"Inspector?" Sergeant Velie's voice boomed over the wire. "I called headquarters but you weren't there, so I guessed you were still at Field's place. . . . I've some interesting news for you from Browne Bros. Do you want me to come up to Field's?"

"No," returned Queen. "We're through here. I'll be

at my office just as soon as I've paid a visit to Field's on Chambers Street. I'll be there if anything important comes up in the interim. Where are you now?"

"Fifth Avenue—I've just come out of Browne's."

"Then go back to headquarters and wait for me. And, Thomas—send a uniformed man up here right away."

Queen hung up and turned to Johnson.

"Stay here until a cop shows up—it won't be long," he grunted. "Have him keep a watch in the apartment and arrange for a relief. Then report back to the main office. . . . Come along, Ellery. This is going to be a busy day!"

Ellery's protests were in vain. His father fussily hustled him out of the building and into the street, where the roar of a taxicab's exhaust effectually drowned out his voice.

CHAPTER X

IN WHICH MR. FIELD'S TOPHATS BEGIN TO ASSUME PROPORTIONS

IT was exactly ten o'clock in the morning when Inspector Queen and his son opened the frosted glass door marked:

MONTE FIELD ATTORNEY-AT-LAW

The large waiting-room they entered was decorated in just such a fashion as might have been expected from a man of Field's taste in clothes. It was deserted, and with a puzzled glance Inspector Queen pushed through the door, Ellery strolling behind, and went into the General Office. This was a long room filled with desks. It resembled a newspaper "city room" except for its rows of bookcases filled with ponderous legal tomes.

The office was in a state of violent upheaval. Stenographers chattered excitedly in small groups. A number of male clerks whispered in a corner; and in the center of the room stood Detective Hesse, talking earnestly to a lean saturnine man with greyed temples. It was evident that the demise of the lawyer had created something of a stir in his place of business.

At the entrance of the Queens the employees looked at each other in a startled way and began to slip back to their desks. An embarrassed silence fell. Hesse hurried forward. His eyes were red and strained.

"Good morning, Hesse," said the Inspector abruptly. "Where's Field's private office?"

The detective led them across the room to still another door, a large PRIVATE lettered on its panels. The three men went into a small office which was overwhelmingly luxurious.

"This chap went in for atmosphere, didn't he?" Ellery chuckled, sinking into a red-leather armchair.

"Let's have it, Hesse," said the Inspector, following Ellery's suit.

Hesse began to talk rapidly. "Got here last night and found the door locked. No sign of a light inside. I listened pretty closely but couldn't hear a sound, so I took it for granted that there was no one inside and camped in the corridor all night. At about a quarter to nine this morning the office-manager breezed in and I collared him. He was that tall bird I was talking to when you came in. Name's Lewin—Oscar Lewin."

"Office-manager, eh?" remarked the old man, inhaling snuff.

"Yes, Chief. He's either dumb or else he knows how to keep his mouth shut," continued Hesse. "Of course, he'd already seen the morning papers and was upset by the news of Field's murder. I could see he didn't like my questions any too well, either. . . . I didn't get a thing out of him. Not a thing. He said he'd gone straight home last night—it seems Field had left about four o'clock and didn't come back—and he didn't know anything about the murder until he read the papers. We've been sort of sliding along here all morning, waiting for you to come."

"Get Lewin for me."

Hesse returned with the lanky office-manager in his wake. Oscar Lewin was physically unprepossessing. He had shifty black eyes and was abnormally thin. There was something predatory in his beaked nose and bony figure. The Inspector looked him over coldly.

"So you're the office-manager," he remarked. "Well, what do you think of this affair, Lewin?"

"It's terrible—simply terrible," groaned Lewin. "I can't imagine how it happened or why. Good Lord, I was talking to him only four o'clock yesterday afternoon!" He seemed genuinely distressed.

"Did Mr. Field appear strange or worried when you spoke to him?"

"Not at all, sir," replied Lewin nervously. "In fact, he was in unusually good spirits. Cracked a joke about the Giants and said he was going to see a darned good show last night—'Gunplay.' And now I see by the papers that he was killed there!"

"Oh, he told you about the play, did he?" asked the Inspector. "He didn't happen to remark by any chance that he was going with anybody?"

"No, sir." Lewin shuffled his feet.

"I see." Queen paused. "Lewin, as manager you must have been closer to Field than any other of his employees. Just what do you know about him personally?"

"Not a thing, sir, not a thing," said Lewin hastily. "Mr. Field was not a man with whom an employee could become familiar. Occasionally he said something about himself, but it was always of a general nature and more jesting than serious. To us outside he was always a considerate and generous employer—that's all."

"What exactly was the calibre of the business he conducted, Lewin? You must certainly know something about that."

"Business?" Lewin seemed startled. "Why, it was as fine a practice as any I've encountered in the law profession. I've worked for Field only two years or so, but he had some high-and-mighty clients, Inspector. I can give you a list of them. . . ."

"Do that, and mail it to me," said Queen. "So he had

a flourishing and respectable practice, eh? Any personal visitors to your knowledge—especially recently?”

“No. I can’t remember ever seeing any one up here except his clients. Of course, he may have known some of them socially. . . . Oh, yes! Of course his valet came here at times—tall, brawny fellow by the name of Michaels.”

“Michaels? I’ll have to remember that name,” said the Inspector thoughtfully. He looked up at Lewin. “All right, Lewin. That will be all now. You might dismiss the force for the day. And—just stay around for a while. I expect one of Mr. Sampson’s men soon, and undoubtedly he will need your help.” Lewin nodded gravely and retired.

The moment the door closed Queen was on his feet. “Where’s Field’s private washroom, Hesse?” he demanded. The detective pointed to a door in a far corner of the room.

Queen opened it, Ellery crowding close behind. They were peering into a tiny cubicle spaced off in an angle of the wall. It contained a wash-bowl, a medicine chest and a small clothes-closet. Queen looked into the medicine chest first. It held a bottle of iodine, a bottle of peroxide, a tube of shaving-cream, and other shaving articles. “Nothing there,” said Ellery. “How about the closet?” The old man pulled the door open curiously. A suit of street-clothes hung there, a half-dozen neckties and a fedora hat. The Inspector carried the hat back into the office and examined it. He handed it to Ellery, who disdainfully returned it at once to its peg in the closet.

“Dang those hats!” exploded the Inspector. There was a knock on the door and Hesse admitted a bland young man.

“Inspector Queen?” inquired the newcomer politely.

“Right,” snapped the Inspector, “and if you’re a re-

porter you can say the police will apprehend the murderer of Monte Field within twenty-four hours. Because that's all I'm going to give you right now."

The young man smiled. "Sorry, Inspector, but I'm not a reporter. I'm Arthur Stoates, new man at District Attorney Sampson's office. The Chief couldn't reach me until this morning and I was busy on something else—that's why I'm a little late. Too bad about Field, isn't it?" He grinned as he threw his coat and hat on a chair.

"It's all in the point of view," grumbled Queen. "He's certainly causing a heap of trouble. Just what were Sampson's instructions?"

"Well, I'm not as familiar with Field's career as I might be, naturally, but I'm pinch-hitting for Tim Cronin, who's tied up this morning on something else. I'm to make a start until Tim gets untangled, which will be some time this afternoon. Cronin, you know, was the man after Field a couple of years ago. He's aching to get busy with these files."

"Fair enough. From what Sampson told me about Cronin—if there's anything incriminating in these records and files, he'll ferret it out.—Hesse, take Mr. Stoates outside and introduce him to Lewin.—That's the office-manager, Stoates. Keep your eye on him—he looks like a wily bird. And, Stoates—remember you're looking not for legitimate business and clientele in these records, but for something crooked. . . . See you later."

Stoates gave him a cheery smile and followed Hesse out. Ellery and his father faced each other across the room.

"What's that you've got in your hand?" asked the old man sharply.

"A copy of 'What Handwriting Tells,' which I picked up in this bookcase," replied Ellery lazily. "Why?"

"Come to think of it now, El," declared the Inspector slowly, "there's something fishy about this handwriting

business." He shook his head in despair and rose. "Come along, son—there isn't a blamed thing here."

On their way through the main office, now empty except for Hesse, Lewin and Stoates, Queen beckoned to the detective. "Go home, Hesse," he said kindly. "Can't have you coming down with the grippe." Hesse grinned and sped through the door.

In a few minutes Inspector Queen was sitting in his private office at Center Street. Ellery termed it "the star chamber." It was small and cozy and homelike. Ellery draped himself over a chair and began to con the books on handwriting which he had filched from Field's apartment and office. The Inspector pressed a buzzer and the solid figure of Thomas Velie loomed in the doorway.

"Morning, Thomas," said Queen. "What is this remarkable news you have for me from Browne Bros.?"

"I don't know how remarkable it is, Inspector," said Velie coolly, seating himself in one of the straight-backed chairs which lined the wall, "but it sounded like the real thing to me. You told me last night to find out about Field's tophat. Well, I've an exact duplicate of it on my desk. Like to see it?"

"Don't be silly, Thomas," said Queen. "On the run!" Velie departed and was back in a moment carrying a hat-box. He tore the string and uncovered a shining tophat, of such fine quality that Queen blinked. The Inspector picked it up curiously. On the inside was marked the size: $7\frac{1}{8}$.

"I spoke to the clerk, an old-timer, down at Browne's. Been waiting on Field for years," resumed Velie. "It seems that Field bought every stitch of his clothing there—for a long time. And it happens that he preferred one clerk. Naturally the old buzzard knows quite a bit about Field's tastes and purchases.

"He says, for one thing, that Field was a fussy dresser.

His clothes were always made to order by Browne's special tailoring department. He went in for fancy suits and cuts and the latest in underclothes and neckwear. . . ."

"What about his taste in hats?" interposed Ellery, without looking up from the book he was reading.

"I was coming to that, sir," continued Velie. "This clerk made a particular point of the hat business. For instance, when I questioned him about the tophat, he said: 'Mr. Field was almost a fanatic on the subject. Why, in the last six months he has bought no less than *three* of them!' I caught that up, of course—made him check back with the sales-records. Sure enough, Field bought three silk-toppers in the last half-year!"

Ellery and his father found themselves staring at each other, the same question on their lips.

"Three—" began the old man.

"Now . . . isn't that an extraordinary circumstance?" asked Ellery slowly, reaching for his pince-nez.

"Where in heaven's name are the other two?" continued Queen, in a bewildered manner.

Ellery was silent.

Queen turned impatiently toward Velie. "What else did you find out, Thomas?"

"Nothing much of value, except for this point"—answered Velie—"that Field was an absolute fiend when it came to clothes. So much so that last year he bought fifteen suits and no less than a dozen hats, including the toppers!"

"Hats, hats, hats!" groaned the Inspector. "The man must have been a lunatic. Look here—did you find out whether Field ever bought walking-sticks at Browne's?"

A look of consternation spread over Velie's face. "Why—why, Inspector," he said ruefully, "I guess I slipped up there. I never even thought of asking, and you hadn't told me last night—"

"Heck! We're none of us perfect," growled Queen. "Get that clerk on the wire for me, Thomas."

Velie picked up one of the telephones on the desk and a few moments later handed the instrument to his superior.

"This is Inspector Queen speaking," said the old man rapidly. "I understand that you served Monte Field for a good many years? . . . Well, I want to check up on a little detail. Did Field ever purchase canes or walking-sticks from you people? . . . What? Oh, I see. . . . Yes. Now, another thing. Did he ever give special orders about the manufacture of his clothes—extra pockets, or things like that? . . . You don't think so. All right. . . . What? Oh, I see. Thank you very much."

He hung up the receiver and turned about.

"Our lamented friend," he said disgustedly, "seems to have had as great an aversion to sticks as he had a love for hats. This clerk said he tried many times to interest Field in canes, and Field invariably refused to buy. Didn't like 'em, he said. And the clerk just confirmed his own impression about the special pockets—nothing doing. So that leaves us up a blank alley."

"On the contrary," said Ellery coolly, "it does nothing of the kind. It proves fairly conclusively that *the only article of apparel* taken away by the murderer last night was the hat. It seems to me that simplifies matters."

"I must have a moron's intelligence," grunted his father. "It doesn't mean a thing to me."

"By the way, Inspector," put in Velie, scowling, "Jimmy reported about the fingerprints on Field's flask. There are a few, but there's no question, he says, that they're all Field's. Jimmy got a print from the Morgue, of course, to check up."

"Well," said the Inspector, "maybe the flask has nothing to do with the crime at all. We'll have to wait, anyway, for Prouty's report on its contents."

"There's something else, Inspector," added Velie. "That junk—the sweepings of the theatre—that you told Panzer to send over to you this morning came a couple of minutes ago. Want to see it?"

"Sure thing, Thomas," said Queen. "And while you're out bring me the list you made last night containing the names of the people who had no stubs. The seat numbers are attached to each name, aren't they?"

Velie nodded and disappeared. Queen was looking morosely at the top of his son's head when the Sergeant returned with an unwieldy package and a typewritten list.

They spread the contents of the package carefully on the desk. For the most part the collected material consisted of crumpled programs, stray scraps of paper, chiefly from candy-boxes, and many ticket-stubs—those which had not been found by Flint and his searchers. Two women's gloves of different design; a small brown button, probably from a man's coat; the cap of a fountain pen; a woman's handkerchief and a few other scattered articles of the kind usually lost or thrown away in theatres came to light.

"Doesn't look as if there's much here, does it?" commented the Inspector. "Well, at least we'll be able to check up on the ticket-stub business."

Velie heaped the lost stubs in a small pile and began to read off their numbers and letters to Queen, who checked them off on the list Velie had brought him. There were not many of these and the checking-off process was completed in a few moments.

"That all, Thomas?" inquired the Inspector, looking up.

"That's all, Chief."

"Well, there are about fifty people still unaccounted for according to this list.—Where's Flint?"

"He's in the building somewhere, Inspector."

Queen picked up his telephone and gave a rapid order. Flint appeared almost at once.

"What did you find last night?" asked Queen abruptly.

"Well, Inspector," answered Flint sheepishly, "we practically dry-cleaned that place. We found quite a bit of stuff, but most of it was programs and things like that, and we left those for the cleaning-women, who were working along with us. But we did pick up a raft of ticket-stubs, especially out in the alleys." He brought forth from his pocket a package of pasteboards neatly bound with a rubber band. Velie took them and continued the process of reading off numbers and letters. When he was finished Queen slapped the typewritten list down on the desk before him.

"No fruit in the loom?" murmured Ellery, looking up from the book.

"Ding it, every one of those people who had no stubs is accounted for!" growled the Inspector. "There isn't a stub or a name left unchecked. . . . Well, there's one thing I can do." He searched through the pile of stubs, referring to the lists, until he found the stub which had belonged to Frances Ives-Pope. He fished from his pocket the four stubs he had collected Monday night and carefully tested the girl's stub with the one for Field's seat. The torn edges did not coincide.

"There's one consolation," the Inspector continued, stuffing the five tickets into his vest pocket, "we haven't found a trace of the six tickets for the seats next to and in front of Field's seat!"

"I didn't think you would," remarked Ellery. He put the book down and regarded his father with unwonted seriousness. "Have you ever stopped to consider, dad, that we don't know definitely *why* Field was in the theatre last night?"

Queen knit his grey brows. "That particular problem

has been puzzling me, of course. We know from Mrs. Russo and Michaels that Field did not care for the theatre—”

“You can never tell what vagary will seize a man,” said Ellery decisively. “Many things might make a non-theatre-going man decide suddenly to go in for that sort of entertainment. The fact remains—he was there. But what I want to know is *why* he was there.”

The old man shook his head gravely. “Was it a business appointment? Remember what Mrs. Russo said—that Field had promised to be back at 10 o’clock.”

“I fancy the business appointment idea,” applauded Ellery. “But consider how many probabilities there are—the Russo woman might be lying and Field said nothing of the sort; or if he did, he might have had no intention of keeping the appointment with her at 10 o’clock.”

“I’ve quite made up my mind, Ellery,” said the Inspector, “whatever the probabilities, that he didn’t go to the Roman Theatre last night to see the show. He went there with his eyes open—for business.”

“I think that’s correct, myself,” returned Ellery, smiling. “But you can never be too careful in weighing possibilities. Now, if he went on business, he went to meet somebody. Was that somebody the murderer?”

“You ask too many questions, Ellery,” said the Inspector.—“Thomas, let’s have a look at the other stuff in that package.”

Velie carefully handed the Inspector the miscellaneous articles one by one. The gloves, fountain-pen cap, button, and handkerchief Queen threw to one side after a quick scrutiny. Nothing remained except the small bits of candy paper and the crumpled programs. The former yielding no clues, Queen took up the programs. And suddenly, in the midst of his examination, he cried delightedly: “See what I’ve found, boys!”

The three men leaned over his shoulder. Queen held a program in his hand, its wrinkles smoothed out. It showed evidences of having been crushed and thrown away. On one of the inside pages, bordering the usual article on men's wear, was a number of varied marks, some forming letters, some forming numbers, still others forming cabalistic designs such as a person scribbles in moments of idle thought.

"Inspector, it looks as if you've found Field's own program!" exclaimed Flint.

"Yes, sir, it certainly does," said Queen sharply. "Flint, look through the papers we found in the dead man's clothing last night and bring me a letter showing his signature." Flint hurried out.

Ellery was studying the scrawls intently. On the top margin of the paper appeared:

The Roman Theatre

WHAT THE MAN WILL WEAR

NEW YORK'S OWN

Evening.

WASNT It the immortal Three Tailors of Toots Street who directed the fashion of the world? The People's Association of Merchant Tailors in its recent official review of fashions assumes a more unpretending attitude, seeming at last to perceive that tailors do not create the rogue. They interpret the ideas and tastes of their patrons, that's all. They are artists, to be sure, but the real arbiters of "What's What" are princes, international play-grounds, lordly

partial roster of the plays in which she carried out leads: "Open Sesame," "The Regiment," "Paphian Song," "La Sonnambula," "Cinderella," "Don Caesar de Bazan," "Monsieur of Figaro," and "The Devil in Paris," the great hit of 1845.

930
815
50,000

The Devil in Paris

Flint returned with a letter. The Inspector compared the signatures—they were plainly by the same hand.

"We'll have them checked by Jimmie down in the laboratory," muttered the old man. "But I guess this is

pretty authentic. It's Field's program, there can't be any doubt of that. . . . What do you make of it, Thomas?"

Velie grated: "I don't know what those other numbers refer to, but that '50,000' couldn't mean anything but dollars, Chief."

"The old boy must have been figuring his bank account," said Queen. "He loved the sight of his own name, didn't he?"

"That's not quite fair to Field," protested Ellery. "When a man is sitting idle, waiting for something to happen—as he will when he is in a theatre before the performance begins—one of his most natural actions is to scribble his initials or his name on the handiest object. In a theatre the handiest object would be the program. . . . The writing of one's own name is fundamental in psychology. So perhaps Field wasn't as egotistical as this seems to make him."

"It's a small point," said the Inspector, studying the scrawls with a frown.

"Perhaps," returned Ellery. "But to get back to a more pressing matter.—I don't agree with you when you say the '50,000' probably refers to Field's bank account. When a man jots down his bank balance he will not do it in such round numbers."

"We can prove or disprove that easily enough," retorted the Inspector, picking up a telephone. He asked the police operator to get him the number of Field's office. When he had spoken to Oscar Lewin for some time, he turned back to Ellery with a crestfallen air.

"You were right, El," he said. "Field had an amazingly small personal account. All his accounts balance to less than six thousand dollars. And this despite the fact that he frequently made deposits of ten and fifteen thousand dollars. Lewin himself was surprised. He hadn't known, he said, how Field's personal finances stood until I asked

him to look the matter up. . . . I'll bet dollars to doughnuts Field played the stock market or the horses!"

"I'm not particularly overwhelmed by the news," remarked Ellery. "It points to the probable reason for the '50,000' on the program. That number not only represents dollars, but more than that—it indicates a business deal in which the stakes were fifty thousand! Not a bad night's work, if he had come out of it alive."

"How about the other two numbers?" asked Queen.

"I'm going to mull over them a bit," replied Ellery, subsiding in his chair. "I *would* like to know what the business deal was that involved such a large financial consideration," he added, absently polishing his pince-nez.

"Whatever the business deal was," said the Inspector sententiously, "you may be sure, my son, it was an evil one."

"An evil one?" inquired Ellery in a serious tone.

"Money's the root of all evil," retorted the Inspector with a grin.

Ellery's tone did not change. "Not only the root, dad—but the fruit, too."

"Another quotation?" mocked the old man.

"Fielding," said Ellery imperturbably.

CHAPTER XI

IN WHICH THE PAST CASTS A SHADOW

THE telephone bell tinkled.

"Q? Sampson speaking," came the District Attorney's voice over the wire.

"Good morning, Henry," said Queen. "Where are you and how do you feel this morning?"

"I'm at the office and I feel rotten," returned Sampson, chuckling. "The doctor insists I'll be a corpse if I keep this up and the office insists the City will go under unless I attend to business. So what's a feller to do? . . . I say, Q."

The Inspector winked at Ellery across the table, as if to say, "I know what's coming!"

"Yes, Henry?"

"There's a gentleman in my private office whom I think it would be greatly to your advantage to meet," continued Sampson in a subdued tone. "He wants to see you and I'm afraid you'll have to chuck whatever you're doing and hotfoot it up here. He"—Sampson's voice became a whisper—"he's a man I can't afford to antagonize unnecessarily, Q, old boy."

The Inspector frowned. "I suppose you're referring to Ives-Pope," he said. "Riled, is he, because we questioned the apple of his eye last night?"

"Not exactly," said Sampson. "He's really a decent old chap. Just—er—just be nice to him, Q, won't you?"

"I'll handle him with silk gloves," chuckled the old man. "If it will ease your mind any I'll drag my son along. He generally attends to our social obligations."

"That will be fine," said Sampson gratefully.

The Inspector turned to Ellery as he hung up. "Poor Henry's in something of a mess," he said quizzically, "and I can't say I blame him for trying to please. Sick as a dog and the politicians hopping on him, this Cræsus howling in his front office. . . . Come along, son, we're going to meet the celebrated Franklin Ives-Pope!"

Ellery groaned, stretching his arms. "You'll have another sick man on your hands if this continues." Nevertheless he jumped up and clamped his hat on his head. "Let's look over this captain of industry."

Queen grinned at Velie. "Before I forget, Thomas. . . . I want you to do a bit of sleuthing to-day. Your job is to find out why Monte Field, who did a rushing legal business and lived in princely style, had only six thousand dollars in his personal account. It's probably Wall Street and the racetrack but I want you to make sure. You might learn something from the cancelled vouchers—Lewin down at Field's office could help you there. . . . And while you're at it—this might be extremely important, Thomas—get a complete line-up on Field's movements all day yesterday."

The two Queens departed for Sampson's headquarters.

The office of the District Attorney was a busy place and even an Inspector of Detectives was treated with scant ceremony in the sacred chambers. Ellery was wroth, and his father smiled, and finally the District Attorney himself came rushing out of his sanctum with a word of displeasure to the clerk who had allowed his friends to cool their heels on a hard bench.

"Watch your throat, young man," warned Queen, as Sampson led the way to his office, muttering maledictions on the head of the offender. "Are you sure I look all right to meet the money-mogul?"

Sampson held the door open. The two Queens on the

threshold saw a man, hands clasped behind his back, looking through the window on the uninteresting vista outside. As the District Attorney closed the door the occupant of the room wheeled about with astonishing agility for a man of his weight.

Franklin Ives-Pope was a relic of more virile financial days. He resembled the strong self-assertive type of magnate who like old Cornelius Vanderbilt had dominated Wall Street as much by force of personality as by extent of wealth. Ives-Pope had clear grey eyes, iron-grey hair, a grizzled mustache, a husky body still springy with youth and an air of authority unmistakably masterful. Standing against the light of the dingy window, he was a most impressive figure of a man and Ellery and Queen, stepping forward, realized at once that here was an individual whose intelligence required no patronage.

The financier spoke in a deep pleasant voice even before Sampson, slightly embarrassed, could make the introduction. "I suppose you're Queen, the man-hunter," he said. "I've been anxious to meet you for a long time, Inspector." He offered a large square hand, which Queen took with dignity.

"It would be unnecessary for me to echo that statement, Mr. Ives-Pope," he said, smiling a little. "Once I took a flyer in Wall Street and I think you've got some of my money.—This, sir, is my son Ellery, who is the brains and beauty of the Queen family."

The big man's eyes measured Ellery's bulk appreciatively. He shook hands, saying, "You've got a smart father there, son!"

"Well!" sighed the District Attorney, setting three chairs. "I'm glad that's over. You haven't the slightest idea, Mr. Ives-Pope, how nervous I've been about this meeting. Queen is the devil himself when it comes to the social amenities, and I shouldn't have been surprised if he

had clapped his handcuffs on you as you shook hands!"

The tension snapped with the big man's hearty chuckle.

The District Attorney came abruptly to the point. "Mr. Ives-Pope is here, Q, to find out for himself just what can be done in the matter of his daughter." Queen nodded. Sampson turned to the financier. "As I told you before, sir, we have every confidence in Inspector Queen—always have had. He generally works without any check or supervision from the District Attorney's office. In view of the circumstances, I thought I should make that clear."

"That's a sane method, Sampson," said Ives-Pope, with approval. "I've always worked on that principle in my own business. Besides, from what I've heard about Inspector Queen, your confidence is well placed."

"Sometimes," said Queen gravely, "I have to do things that go against the grain. I will be frank to say that some things I did last night in the line of duty were extremely disagreeable to me. I suppose, Mr. Ives-Pope, your daughter is upset because of our little talk last night?"

Ives-Pope was silent for a moment. Then he raised his head and met the Inspector's gaze squarely. "Look here, Inspector," he said. "We're both men of the world and men of business. We've had dealings with all sorts of queer people, both of us; and we have, too, solved problems that presented enormous difficulties to others. So I think we can converse frankly. . . . Yes, my daughter Frances is more than a little upset. Incidentally, so is her mother, who is an ill woman at the best of times; and her brother Stanford, my son—but we needn't go into that. . . . Frances told me last night when she got home with—her friends—everything that happened. I know my daughter, Inspector; and I'd stake my fortune that there isn't the slightest connection between her and Field."

"My dear sir," returned the Inspector quietly, "I didn't

accuse her of anything. Nobody knows better than I what peculiar things can happen in the course of a criminal investigation; therefore I never let the slightest blind spot escape my notice. All I did was to ask her to identify the bag. When she did so, I told her where it was found. I was waiting, of course, for an explanation. It did not come. . . . You must understand, Mr. Ives-Pope, that when a man is murdered and a woman's bag is found in his pocket it is the duty of the police to discover the owner of the bag and his or her connection with the crime. But of course—I do not have to convince you of that.”

The magnate drummed on the arm of his chair. “I see your point of view, Inspector,” he said. “It was obviously your duty, and it is still your duty to go to the bottom of the thing. In fact, I want you to make every effort to. My own personal opinion is that she is the victim of circumstances. But I don't want to plead her case. I trust you sufficiently to rely on your judgment after you've thoroughly probed the problem.” He paused. “Inspector Queen, how would you like to have me arrange a little interview at my home to-morrow morning? I would not ask you to go to this trouble,” he added apologetically, “except that Frances is quite ill, and her mother insists she stay at home. May we expect you?”

“Very good of you, Mr. Ives-Pope,” remarked Queen calmly. “We'll be there.”

The financier seemed indisposed to end the interview. He shifted heavily in his chair. “I've always been a fair man, Inspector,” he said. “I feel somehow that I may be accused of using my position as a means of securing special privileges. That is not so. The shock of your tactics last night made it impossible for Frances to tell her story. At home, among the members of her family, I am sure she will be able to clear up her connection with the affair to your satisfaction.” He hesitated for a mo-

ment, then continued in a colder tone. "Her fiancé will be there and perhaps his presence will help to calm her." His voice expressed the thought that he personally did not think so. "May we expect you, let us say, at ten-thirty?"

"That will be fine," said Queen, nodding. "I should like to know more definitely, sir, just who will be present."

"I can arrange it as you wish, Inspector," replied Ives-Pope, "but I imagine Mrs. Ives-Pope will want to be there and I know that Mr. Barry will—my future son-in-law," he explained dryly. "Perhaps a few of Frances' friends—theatrical friends. My son Stanford may also grace us with his presence—a very busy young man, you know," he added with a suspicion of bitterness.

The three men shifted embarrassedly. Ives-Pope rose with a sigh and Ellery, Queen and Sampson followed suit. "That's all, I think, Inspector," said the financier in a lighter tone. "Is there anything else I can do?"

"Not a thing."

"Then I'll be getting along." Ives-Pope turned to Ellery and Sampson. "Of course, Sampson, if you can get away, I'd like you to be there. Do you think you can make it?" The District Attorney nodded. "And Mr. Queen"—the big man turned to Ellery—"will you come also? I understand that you have been following the investigation very closely at your father's side. We shall be happy to have you."

"I'll be there," said Ellery softly, and Ives-Pope left the office.

"Well, what do you think, Q?" asked Sampson, fidgeting in his swivel-chair.

"A most interesting man," returned the Inspector. "How fair-minded he is!"

"Oh, yes—yes," said Sampson. "Er—Q, he asked me before you came if you wouldn't go easy on the publicity. Sort of special favor, you know."

"He didn't have the nerve to come out with it to me, eh?" chuckled the Inspector. "He's quite human. . . . Well, Henry, I'll do my best, but if that young woman is implicated seriously, I won't vouch for hands off with the press."

"All right, all right, Q—it's up to you," said Sampson irritably. "Damn this throat of mine!" He took an atomizer from a desk-drawer and sprinkled his throat wryly.

"Didn't Ives-Pope recently donate a hundred thousand dollars to the Chemical Research Foundation?" asked Ellery suddenly, turning to Sampson.

"I seem to remember something of that sort," said Sampson, gargling. "Why?"

Ellery mumbled an inaudible explanation that was lost in Sampson's violent gyrations with the sprayer. Queen, who was regarding his son speculatively, shook his head, consulted his watch and said,

"Well, son, it's time we knocked off for lunch. What do you say—Henry, think you'd like to join us in a bite?"

Sampson grinned with an effort. "I'm full up to my neck with work, but even a District Attorney has to eat," he said. "I'll go on only one condition—that I pay the check. I owe you something, anyway."

As they donned their coats Queen picked up Sampson's telephone.

"Mr. Morgan?. . . Oh, hello, Morgan. I say, do you think you can find a little time this afternoon for a chat? . . . Right. Two-thirty will be fine. Good-by."

"That settles that," said the Inspector comfortably. "Always pays to be polite, Ellery—remember that."

At two-thirty promptly the two Queens were ushered into the quiet law-office of Benjamin Morgan. It was noticeably different from Field's lavish suite—richly furnished but with a more business-like simplicity. A smiling

young woman closed the door after them. Morgan greeted them with some reserve. He held out a box of cigars as they sat down.

"No thanks—my snuff will do," said the Inspector genially, while Ellery after being introduced lit a cigarette and blew smoke-rings. Morgan lit a cigar with shaking fingers.

"I suppose you're here to continue that talk of ours last night, Inspector?" said Morgan.

Queen sneezed, replaced his snuff-box, and leaned back in the chair. "Look here, Morgan old man," he said evenly. "You haven't been quite on the up-and-up with me."

"What do you mean?" asked Morgan, coloring.

"You told me last night," said the Inspector reflectively, "you told me last night that you parted amicably with Field two years ago, when you dissolved the firm of Field & Morgan. Did you say that?"

"I did," said Morgan.

"How, then, my dear fellow," asked Queen, "do you explain the little incident of the quarrel at the Webster Club? I certainly would not call a threat against another man's life an 'amicable' way of dissolving a partnership!"

Morgan sat quietly for several minutes while Queen stared patiently at him and Ellery sighed. Then he looked up and began to speak in a passionate undertone.

"I'm sorry, Inspector," he muttered, glancing away. "I might have known that a threat like that would be remembered by somebody. . . . Yes, it's true enough. We had lunch one day in the Webster Club at Field's suggestion. As far as I was concerned, the less I had to do with him socially the better I liked it. But the purpose of the luncheon was to go over some last details of the dissolution, and of couse I had no choice. . . . I'm afraid I lost my temper. I did make a threat against his life, but it was—

well, it was said in the heat of an angry moment. I forgot the whole thing before the week was over."

The Inspector nodded sagely. "Yes, things do happen like that sometimes. But"—and Morgan licked his lips in despairing anticipation—"a man doesn't threaten another man's life, even if he doesn't mean it, merely over a matter of business detail." He leveled his finger at Morgan's shrinking body. "Come on now, man—out with it. What are you holding back?"

Morgan's entire body had gone flaccid. His lips were ashy as he turned from one Queen to the other, mute appeal in his eyes. But their glances were inexorable and Ellery, who was regarding him much as a vivisectionist regards a guinea-pig, interrupted.

"My dear Morgan," he said coldly, "Field had something on you, and he thought that that was a good time to tell you about it. It's as obvious as the red in your eye."

"You've guessed it in part, Mr. Queen. I've been one of the most unfortunate men God ever created. That devil Field—whoever killed him deserves to be decorated for his service to humanity. He was an octopus—a soulless beast in human form. I can't tell you how happy—yes, happy!—I am that he is dead!"

"Softly there, Morgan," said Queen. "Although I gather our mutual friend was a good deal of a skunk, your remarks might be overheard by a less sympathetic audience. And—?"

"Here's the whole story," mumbled Morgan, his eyes fixed on the desk-blotter. "It's a hard one to tell. . . . When I was a kid at college I got into some trouble with a girl—a waitress in the college restaurant. She was not bad—just weak, and I suppose I was wild in those days. At any rate she had a child—my child. . . . I suppose you know that I come from a strait-laced family. If you don't, you would find out soon enough on investiga-

tion. They had great plans for me, they were socially ambitious—to cut it short, I couldn't very well marry the girl and bring her to father's house as my wife. It was a caddish thing to do. . . .”

He paused.

“But it was done, and that's all that matters. I've—I've always loved her. She was sensible enough about the arrangements. . . . I managed to provide for her out of my generous allowance. No one—I'll swear not a soul in this world with the exception of her widowed mother, a fine old lady—knew about the affair. I'll swear to that, I say. And yet—” His fist clenched, but he resumed with a sigh. “Eventually, I married the girl whom my family had selected for me.” There was a painful silence as he stopped to clear his throat. “It was a *mariage de convenance*—just that and nothing more. She came from an old aristocratic family, and I had the money. We have lived fairly happily together. . . . Then I met Field. I curse the day I ever consented to go into partnership with him—but my own business was not exactly all it might have been and Field, if nothing else, was an aggressive and clever lawyer.”

The Inspector took a pinch of snuff.

“Everything went smoothly at first,” continued Morgan in the same low tone. “But by degrees I began to suspect that my partner was not everything he should have been. Queer clients—queer clients indeed—would enter his private office after hours; he would evade my questions about them; things began to look peculiar. Finally I decided my own reputation would suffer if I continued to be linked with the man, and I broached the subject of dissolution. Field objected strenuously, but I was stubborn and after all he could not dominate my desires. We dissolved.”

Ellery's fingers tapped an absent tattoo on the handle of his stick.

"Then the affair at the Webster. He insisted we have lunch together for the settlement of the last few details. That wasn't his purpose at all, of course. You can guess, I suppose, his intentions. . . . He came out quite suavely with the overwhelming statement that he knew I was supporting a woman and my illegitimate child. He said that he had some of my letters to prove it, and a number of cancelled vouchers of checks I had sent her. . . . He admitted he had stolen them from me. I hadn't looked at them for years, of course. . . . Then he blandly announced that he meant to make capital out of this evidence!"

"Blackmail!" muttered Ellery, a light creeping into his eyes.

"Yes, blackmail," retorted Morgan bitterly. "Nothing less. He described in very graphic terms what would happen if the story should come out. Oh, Field was a clever crook! I saw the entire structure of social position I had built up—a process which took years—destroyed in an instant. My wife, her family, my own family—and more than that, the circle in which we moved—I shouldn't have been able to lift my head out of the muck. And as for business—well, it doesn't take much to make important clients go elsewhere for their legal work. I was trapped—I knew it and he knew it."

"Just how much did he want, Morgan?" asked Queen.

"Enough! He wanted twenty-five thousand dollars—just to keep quiet. I didn't even have any assurances that the affair would end there. I was caught and caught properly. Because, remember, this was not an affair which had died years before. I was still supporting that poor woman and my son. I am supporting them now. I will—continue to support them." He stared at his fingernails.

"I paid the money," he resumed morosely. "It meant

stretching a bit, but I paid it. But the harm was done. I saw red there at the Club, and—but you know what happened.”

“And this blackmail has continued all the while, Morgan?” asked the Inspector.

“Yes, sir—for two solid years. The man was insatiable, I tell you! Even to-day I can’t completely understand it. He must have been earning tremendous fees in his own practice, and yet he always seemed to be needing money. No small change, either—I have never paid him less than ten thousand dollars at one time!”

Queen and Ellery looked at each other fleetingly. Queen said, “Well, Morgan, it’s a pretty kettle of fish. The more I hear about Field the more I dislike putting the irons on the fellow who did away with him. However! In the light of what you’ve told me, your statement last night that you hadn’t seen Field for two years is patently untrue. When *did* you see him last?”

Morgan appeared to be racking his memory. “Oh, it was about two months ago, Inspector,” he said at last.

The Inspector shifted in his chair. “I see. . . . I’m sorry you didn’t tell me all this last night. You understand, of course, that your story is perfectly safe with the police. And it’s mighty vital information. Now then—do you happen to know a woman by the name of Angela Russo?”

Morgan stared. “Why, no, Inspector. I’ve never heard of her.”

Queen was silent for a moment. “Do you know a gentleman called ‘Parson Johnny’?”

“I think I can give you some information there, Inspector. I’m certain that during our partnership Field was using the little thug for some shady business of his own. I caught him sneaking up into the office a number of times after hours, and when I asked Field about him, he would

sneer and say, 'Oh, that's only Parson Johnny, a friend of mine!' But it was sufficient to establish the man's identity. What their connection was I can't tell you, because I don't know."

"Thanks, Morgan," said the Inspector. "I'm glad you told me that. And now—one last question. Have you ever heard the name Charles Michaels?"

"To be sure I have," responded Morgan grimly. "Michaels was Field's so-called valet—he acted in the capacity of bodyguard and was really a blackguard, or I'm greatly mistaken in my judgment of men. He came to the office once in a while. I can't think of anything else about him, Inspector.

"He knows you, of course?" asked Queen.

"Why—I suppose so," returned Morgan doubtfully. "I never spoke to him, but undoubtedly he saw me during his visits to the office."

"Well, now, that's fine, Morgan," grunted Queen, rising. "This has been a most interesting and informative chat. And—no, I don't think there's anything else. That is, at the moment. Just ride along, Morgan, and keep in town—available if we need you for anything. Remember that, won't you?"

"I'm not likely to forget it," said Morgan dully. "And—of course the story I told you—about my son—it won't come out?"

"You needn't have the slightest fear—about that, Morgan," said Queen, and a few moments later he and Ellery were on the sidewalk.

"So it was blackmail, dad," murmured Ellery. "That gives me an idea, do you know?"

"Well, son, I've a few ideas of my own!" chuckled Queen, and in a telepathic silence they walked briskly down the street in the direction of headquarters.

CHAPTER XII

IN WHICH THE QUEENS INVADE SOCIETY

WEDNESDAY morning found Djuna pouring the coffee before a bemused Inspector and a chattering Ellery. The telephone bell rang. Both Ellery and his father jumped for the instrument.

"Here! What are you doing?" exclaimed Queen. "I'm expecting a call and that's it!"

"Now, now, sir, allow a bibliophile the privilege of using his own telephone," retorted Ellery. "I have a feeling that that's my friend the book-dealer calling me about the elusive Falconer."

"Look here, Ellery, don't start—" While they were chaffing each other good-naturedly across the table, Djuna picked up the telephone.

"The Inspector—the Inspector, did you say? Inspector—" said Djuna, grinning as he held the mouthpiece to his thin chest, "it's for you."

Ellery subsided in his chair while Queen, with an air of triumph, snatched the instrument.

"Yes?"

"Stoates calling from Field's office, Inspector," came a fresh cheery young voice. "I want to put Mr. Cronin on the wire."

The Inspector's brow wrinkled in anticipation. Ellery was listening intently, and even Djuna, with the monkey-like eagerness of his sharp features, had become rooted to his corner, as if he, too, awaited important news. Djuna in this respect resembled his brother anthropoid—there was

an alertness, a bright inquisitiveness in his attitude and mien which delighted the Queens eternally.

Finally a high-pitched voice came over the wire. "This is Tim Cronin speaking, Inspector," it said. "How are you? I haven't got round to seeing you for an age."

"I'm getting a little bent and withered, Tim, but otherwise I'm still all there," returned Queen. "What's on your mind? Have you found anything?"

"Now that's the very peculiar part of the whole business, Inspector," came Cronin's excited tones. "As you know, I've been watching this bird Field for years. He's been my pet nightmare for as long as I can remember. The D. A. tells me that he gave you the story night before last, so I needn't go into it. But in all these years of watching and waiting and digging I've never been able to find a solitary piece of evidence against that crook that I could bring into a courtroom. And he was a crook, Inspector—I'd stake my life on that. . . . Anyway, it's the old story here. I really shouldn't have hoped for anything better, knowing Field as I did. And yet—well, I couldn't help praying that somewhere, somehow, he would slip up, and that I'd nail it when I could get my hands on his private records. Inspector—there's nothing doing."

Queen's face reflected a fleeting disappointment, which Ellery interpreted with a sigh, rising as he did so to walk restlessly up and down the room.

"I guess we can't help it, Tim," returned Queen, with an effort at heartiness. "Don't worry—we've other irons in the fire."

"Inspector," said Cronin abruptly, "you've got your hands full. Field was a really slick article. And from the way it looks to me, the genius who could get past his guard and put him away is a really slick article, too. He couldn't be anything else. Incidentally, we're not half-way through with the files and maybe what we've looked

over isn't as unpromising as I made it sound. There's plenty here to suggest shady work on Field's part—it's just that there's no direct incriminating evidence. We're hoping that we find something as we go on."

"All right, Tim—keep up the good work," muttered the Inspector. "And let me know how you make out. . . . Is Lewin there?"

"You mean the office manager?" Cronin's voice lowered. "He's around somewhere. Why?"

"You want to keep your eye peeled," said Queen. "I have a sneaking suspicion he's not as stupid as he sounds. Just don't let him get too familiar with any records lying around. For all we know, he may have been in on Field's little side-line."

"Right, Inspector. Call you sometime later," and the receiver clicked as Cronin hung up.

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At ten-thirty Queen and Ellery pushed open the high gate at the entrance to the Ives-Pope residence on Riverside Drive. Ellery was moved to remark that the atmosphere was a perfect invitation to formal morning-dress and that he was going to feel extremely uncomfortable when they were admitted through the stone portals.

In truth, the house which concealed the destinies of the Ives-Popes was in many respects awe-inspiring to men of the modest tastes of the Queens. It was a huge rambling old stone house, set far back from the Drive, hunched on the greensward of a respectable acreage. "Must have cost a pretty penny," grunted the Inspector as his eyes swept the rolling lawns surrounding the building. Gardens and summer-houses; walks and bowered nooks—one would have thought himself miles away from the city which roared by a scant few rods away, behind the high iron palings which circled the mansion. The Ives-Popes were immensely wealthy and brought to this not uncommon pos-

session a lineage stretching back into the dim recesses of American colonization.

The front door was opened by a whiskered patrician whose back seemed composed of steel and whose nose was elevated at a perilous angle toward the ceiling. Ellery lounged in the doorway, surveying this uniformed nobleman with admiration, while Inspector Queen fumbled in his pockets for a card. He was a long time producing one; the stiff-backed flunkey stood graven into stone. Red-faced, the Inspector finally discovered a battered card. He placed it on the extended salver and watched the butler retreat to some cavern of his own.

Ellery chuckled as his father drew himself up at the sight of Franklin Ives-Pope's burly figure emerging from a wide carved doorway.

The financier hurried toward them.

"Inspector! Mr. Queen!" he exclaimed in a cordial tone. "Come right in. Have you been waiting long?"

The Inspector mumbled a greeting. They walked through a high-ceilinged shining-floored hall, decorated with austere old furniture.

"You're on the dot, gentlemen," said Ives-Pope, standing aside to allow them to pass into a large room. "Here are some additional members of our little board-meeting. I think you know all of us present."

The Inspector and Ellery looked about. "I know everybody, sir, except that gentleman—I presume he is Mr. Stanford Ives-Pope," said Queen. "I'm afraid my son has still to make the acquaintance of—Mr. Peale, is it?—Mr. Barry—and, of course, Mr. Ives-Pope."

The introductions were made in a strained fashion. "Ah, Q!" murmured District Attorney Sampson, hurrying across the room. "I wouldn't have missed this for the world," he said in a low tone. "First time I've met most of the people who'll be present at the inquisition."

"What is that fellow Peale doing here?" muttered Queen to the District Attorney, while Ellery crossed the room to engage the three young men on the other side in conversation. Ives-Pope had excused himself and disappeared.

"He's a friend of young Ives-Pope, and, of course, he's chummy with Barry there, too," returned the District Attorney. "I gathered from the chit-chat before you came that Stanford, Ives-Pope's son, originally introduced these professional people to his sister Frances. That's how she met Barry and fell in love with him. Peale seems on good terms with the young lady, too."

"I wonder how much Ives-Pope and his aristocratic spouse like the bourgeois company their children keep," said the Inspector, eyeing the small group on the other side of the room with interest.

"You'll find out soon enough," chuckled Sampson. "Just watch the icicles dripping from Mrs. Ives-Pope's eyebrows every time she sees one of these actors. I imagine they're about as welcome as a bunch of Bolsheviks."

Queen put his hands behind his back and stared curiously about the room. It was a library, well stocked with rich and rare books, catalogued carefully and immaculate behind shining glass. A desk dominated the center of the room. It was unpretentious for a millionaire's study, the Inspector noted with approval.

"Incidentally," resumed Sampson, "Eve Ellis, the girl who you said was with Miss Ives-Pope and her fiancé at the Roman Theatre Monday night is here, too. She's upstairs keeping the little heiress company, I imagine. Don't think the old lady likes it much. But they're both charming girls."

"What a pleasant place this must be when the Ives-Popes and the actors get together in private!" grunted Queen.

The four young men strolled toward them. Stanford Ives-Pope was a slender, well-manicured young man,

fashionably dressed. There were deep pouches under his eyes. He wore a restless air of boredom that Queen was quick to note. Both Peale and Barry, the actors, were attired faultlessly.

"Mr. Queen tells me that you've got a pretty problem on your hands, Inspector," drawled Stanford Ives-Pope. "We're all uncommonly sorry to see poor sis dragged into it. How in the world did her purse ever get into that chap's pocket? Barry hasn't slept for days over Frances' predicament, I give you my word!"

"My dear young man," said the Inspector, with a twinkle in his eye, "if I knew how Miss Ives-Pope's purse found its way into Monte Field's pocket, I wouldn't be here this morning. That's just one of the things that make this case so infernally interesting."

"The pleasure's all yours, Inspector. But you certainly can't think Frances had the slightest connection with all this?"

Queen smiled. "I can't think anything yet, young man," he protested. "I haven't heard what your sister has to say about it."

"She'll explain all right, Inspector," said Stephen Barry, his handsome face drawn into lines of fatigue. "You needn't worry about that. It's the damnable suspicion that she's open to that makes me angry—the whole thing is ridiculous!"

"I know just how you feel, Mr. Barry," said the Inspector kindly. "And I want to take this opportunity of apologizing for my conduct the other night. I was perhaps a little—harsh."

"I suppose I ought to apologize, too," returned Barry, with a wan smile. "I guess I said a few things I didn't mean in that office. In the heat of the moment—seeing Frances—Miss Ives-Pope go off in a faint—" He paused awkwardly.

Peale, a massive giant, ruddy and wholesome in his morning clothes, put his arm affectionately about Barry's shoulders. "I'm sure the Inspector understood, Steve old boy," he said cheerfully. "Don't take it so much to heart—everything's bound to come out all right."

"You can leave it to Inspector Queen," said Sampson, nudging the Inspector jovially in the ribs. "He's the only bloodhound I've ever met who has a heart under his badge—and if Miss Ives-Pope can clear this thing up to his satisfaction, even to a reasonable extent, that will be the end of it."

"Oh, I don't know," murmured Ellery thoughtfully. "Dad's a great one for surprises. As for Miss Ives-Pope"—he smiled ruefully and bowed to the actor—"Mr. Barry, you're a deucedly lucky fellow."

"You wouldn't think so if you saw the mater," drawled Stanford Ives-Pope. "If I'm not mistaken, here she barges in now."

The men turned toward the door. An enormously stout woman was waddling in. A uniformed nurse supported her carefully under one huge arm, holding a large green bottle in her other hand. The financier followed briskly, by the side of a white-haired youngish looking man, wearing a dark coat and holding a black bag in his hand.

"Catharine, my dear," said Ives-Pope in a low voice to the stout woman as she sank into a great-chair, "these are the gentlemen whom I told you about—Inspector Richard Queen and Mr. Ellery Queen."

The two Queens bowed, receiving a stony glance from the myopic eyes of Mrs. Ives-Pope. "Charmed, I'm sure," she shrilled. "Where's Nurse? Nurse! I feel faint, please."

The uniformed girl hurried to her side, the green bottle ready. Mrs. Ives-Pope closed her eyes and inhaled, sighing with relief. The financier hurriedly introduced the white-

haired man, Dr. Vincent Cornish, the family physician. The physician made swift apologies and disappeared behind the butler. "Great chap, this Cornish," whispered Sampson to Queen. "Not only the most fashionable doctor on the Drive, but a genuine scientist as well." The Inspector elevated his brows, but said nothing.

"The mater's one reason why I never cared for the medical profession," Stanford Ives-Pope was saying in a loud whisper to Ellery.

"Ah! Frances, my dear!" Ives-Pope hurried forward, followed by Barry, who dashed for the door. Mrs. Ives-Pope's fishy stare enveloped his back with cold disapproval. James Peale coughed embarrassedly and made a mumbled remark to Sampson.

Frances, attired in a filmy morning-gown, her face pale and drawn, entered the room leaning heavily on the arm of Eve Ellis, the actress. Her smile was somewhat forced as she murmured a greeting to the Inspector. Eve Ellis was introduced by Peale and the two girls seated themselves near Mrs. Ives-Pope. The old lady was sitting squarely in her chair, glaring about her like a lioness whose cub has been threatened. Two servants appeared silently and set chairs for the men. At Ives-Pope's urgent request Queen sat down at the big desk. Ellery refused a chair, preferring to lean against a bookcase behind and to the side of the company.

When the conversation had died away the Inspector cleared his throat and turned toward Frances, who after a startled flutter of the eyelids returned his glance steadily.

"First of all, Miss Frances—I hope I may call you that," began Queen in a fatherly tone, "allow me to explain my tactics of Monday night and to apologize for what must have seemed to you a totally unwarranted severity. From what Mr. Ives-Pope has told me, you can explain your actions on the night of the murder of Monte Field. I take

it, therefore, that as far as you are concerned our little chat this morning will effectually remove you from the investigation. Before we have that chat, please believe me when I say that Monday night you were to me merely one of a number of suspicious characters. I acted in accordance with my habits in such cases. I see now how, to a woman of your breeding and social position, a grilling by a policeman under such tense circumstances would cause sufficient shock to bring on your present condition."

Frances smiled wearily. "You're forgiven, Inspector," she said in a clear, low voice. "It was my fault for being so foolish. I'm ready to answer any questions you may care to ask me."

"In just a moment, my dear." The Inspector shifted a bit to include the entire silent company in his next remark. "I should like to make one point, ladies and gentlemen," he said gravely. "We are assembled here for a definite purpose, which is to discover a possible connection, and there must be one, between the fact that Miss Ives-Pope's bag was found in the dead man's pocket, and the fact that Miss Ives-Pope apparently was unable to explain this circumstance. Now, whether this morning's work bears fruit or not, I must ask you all to keep whatever is said a profound secret. As District Attorney Sampson knows very well, I do not generally conduct an investigation with such a large audience. But I am making this exception because I believe you are all deeply concerned in the unfortunate young lady who has been drawn into this crime. You cannot, however, expect any consideration at my hands if one word of to-day's conversation reaches outside ears. Do we understand each other?"

"I say, Inspector," protested young Ives-Pope, "that's putting it a bit strong, don't you think? We all of us know the story, anyway."

"Perhaps, Mr. Ives-Pope," retorted the Inspector with

a grim smile, "that is the reason I have consented to have all of you here."

There was a little rustle and Mrs. Ives-Pope opened her mouth as if to burst into wrathful speech. A sharp look from her husband made her lips droop together, with the protest unuttered. She transferred her glare to the actress sitting by Frances' side. Eve Ellis blushed. The nurse stood by Mrs. Ives-Pope with the smelling salts, like a setter-dog about to point.

"Now, Miss Frances," resumed Queen kindly, "this is where we stand. I examine the body of a dead man named Monte Field, prominent lawyer, who was apparently enjoying an interesting play before he was so unceremoniously done away with, and find, in the rear coat-tail pocket of his full-dress suit, an evening bag. I identify this as yours by a few calling cards and some personal papers inside. I say to myself, 'Aha! A lady enters the problem!'—naturally enough. And I send one of my men to summon you, with the idea of allowing you to explain a most suspicious circumstance. You come—and you faint on being confronted with your property and the news of its place of discovery. At the time, I say to myself, 'This young lady knows something!'—a not unnatural conclusion. Now, in what way can you convince me that you know nothing—and that your fainting was caused only by the shock of the thing? Remember, Miss Frances—I am putting the problem not as Richard Queen but as a policeman looking for the truth."

"My story is not as illuminating, perhaps, as you might like it to be, Inspector," answered Frances quietly, in the deep hush that followed Queen's peroration. "I don't see how it is going to help you at all. But some facts which I think unimportant may be significant to your trained mind. . . . Roughly, this is what happened.

"I came to be in the Roman Theatre Monday night in

a natural way. Since my engagement to Mr. Barry, although it has been a very quiet affair"—Mrs. Ives-Pope sniffed; her husband looked steadfastly at a point beyond his daughter's dark hair—"I have often dropped into the theatre, following a habit of meeting my fiancé after the performance. At such times he would either escort me home or take me to some place in the neighborhood for supper. Generally we make arrangements beforehand for these theatre-meetings; but sometimes I drop in unexpectedly if the opportunity presents itself. Monday night was one of those times. . . .

"I got to the Roman a few minutes before the end of the first act, since I have of course seen 'Gunplay' any number of times. I had my regular seat—arranged for me many weeks ago by Mr. Barry through Mr. Panzer—and had no more than settled myself to watch the performance when the curtain came down for the first intermission. I was feeling a little warm; the air was none too good. . . . I went first to the ladies' rest-room, downstairs off the general lounge. Then I came up again and went out into the alley through the open door. There was quite a crowd of people there, enjoying the air."

She paused for a moment and Ellery, leaning against the bookcase, sharply surveyed the faces of the little audience. Mrs. Ives-Pope was looking about in her leviathan manner; Ives-Pope was still staring at the wall above Frances' head; Stanford was biting his fingernails; Peale and Barry were both watching Frances with nervous sympathy, looking furtively at Queen as if to gauge the effect of her words upon him; Eve Ellis's hand had stolen forward to clasp Frances' firmly.

The Inspector cleared his throat once more.

"Which alley was it, Miss Frances—the one on the left or the one on the right?" he asked.

"The one on the left, Inspector," she answered promptly.

"You know I was sitting in M8 Left, and I suppose it was natural for me to go to the alley on that side."

"Quite so," said Queen, smiling. "Go on, please."

"I stepped out into the alley," she resumed, less nervously, "and, not seeing any one I knew, stood close to the brick wall of the theatre, a little behind the open iron door. The freshness of the night-air after the rain was delightful. I hadn't been standing there more than two minutes when I felt somebody brush up against me. I naturally moved a little to one side, thinking the person had stumbled. But when he—it was a man—when he did it again, I became a little frightened and started to walk away. He—he grasped my wrist and pulled me back. We were half-way behind the iron door, which was not pushed back completely and I doubt if any one noticed his action."

"I see—I see," murmured the Inspector sympathetically. "It seems an unusual thing for a total stranger to do in a public place."

"It seemed as if he wanted to kiss me, Inspector. He leaned over and whispered, 'Good evening, honey!' and—well, of course, I jumped to that conclusion. I drew back a little and said as coldly as I could, 'Please let me go, or I will call for help.' He just laughed at that and bent closer. The reek of whisky on his breath was overpowering. It made me ill."

She stopped. Eve Ellis patted her hand reassuringly. Peale nudged Barry forcibly as the young man half-rose to his feet in muttered protest. "Miss Frances, I'm going to ask you a peculiar question—it's almost ridiculous when you come to think of it," said the Inspector, leaning back in his chair. "Did the reek on his breath suggest good liquor or bad liquor? . . . There! I knew you'd smile." And the entire company tittered at the whimsical expression on Queen's face.

"Well, Inspector—it's hard to answer that," returned the girl freely. "I'm afraid I'm not on intimate terms with spirits. But from what I can remember, it had the odor of rather fine liquor. Fine liquor—but plenty of it!" she concluded with a grim little toss of her head.

"I would've spotted the vintage in a minute if I'd been there!" muttered Stanford Ives-Pope.

His father's lips tightened, but after a moment they relaxed into the suspicion of a grin. He shook his head warningly at his son.

"Go ahead, Miss Frances," said the Inspector.

"I was terribly frightened," the girl confessed, with a tremor of her red lips. "And feeling nauseated and all—I wrenched away from his outstretched hand and stumbled blindly into the theatre. The next thing I remember is sitting in my seat listening to the warning ring of the backstage bell, announcing the beginning of the second act. I really don't remember how I got there. My heart was in my throat and now I distinctly recall thinking that I would not tell Stephen—Mr. Barry—anything about the incident for fear he would want to look up this man and punish him. Mr. Barry is terribly jealous, you know." She smiled tenderly at her fiancé, who suddenly smiled back at her.

"And that, Inspector, is all I know about what happened Monday night," she resumed. "I know you're going to ask me where my purse comes into it. Well—it doesn't at all, Inspector. Because on my word of honor I can't remember a thing about it!"

Queen shifted in his chair. "And how is that, Miss Frances?"

"Actually, I didn't even know I had lost it until you showed it to me in the manager's office," she answered bravely. "I recall taking it with me when I rose at the end of the first act to go to the rest-room; and also opening

it there to use my powder-puff. But whether I left it there or dropped it later, somewhere else, I don't know to this minute."

"Don't you think, Miss Frances," interposed Queen, reaching for his snuff-box and then guiltily dropping it back into his pocket as he met the icy gaze of Mrs. Ives-Pope, "that you might have dropped it in the alley after this man accosted you?"

A look of relief spread over the girl's face, and it became almost animated. "Why, Inspector!" she cried. "That was just what I have thought about it all the time, but it seemed such a lame explanation—and I was so horribly afraid that I might be caught in a sort of—of spider's web. . . . I just couldn't bring myself to tell you that! While I don't actually remember, it seems logical, doesn't it?—that I dropped it when he grasped my wrist and entirely forgot about it afterward."

The Inspector smiled. "On the contrary, my dear," he said, "it is the only explanation which seems to cover the facts. In all probability this man found it there—picked it up—and in a moment of half-drunken amorousness put it into his pocket, probably intending to return it to you later. In this way he would have had another opportunity to meet you. He seems to have been quite smitten by your charms, my dear—and no wonder." And the Inspector bowed a little stiffly while the girl, the color in her face now completely restored, favored him with a dazzling smile.

"Now—a few things more, Miss Frances, and this little inquisition will be over," continued Queen. "Can you describe his physical appearance?"

"Oh, yes!" Frances returned quickly. "He made a rather forcible impression on me, as you can imagine. He was a trifle taller than I—that would make him about five feet eight—and inclined to corpulence. His face was

bloated and he had deep leaden-colored pouches under his eyes. I've never seen a more dissipated-looking man. He was clean-shaven. There was nothing remarkable about his features except perhaps a prominent nose."

"That would be our friend Mr. Field, all right," remarked the Inspector grimly. "Now—think carefully, Miss Frances. Did you ever meet this man anywhere before—did you recognize him at all?"

The girl responded instantly. "I don't have to think much about that, Inspector. I can answer positively that I never saw the man before in my life!"

The pause which ensued was broken by the cool, even tones of Ellery. All heads turned toward him in a startled manner as he spoke.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Ives-Pope, for interrupting," he said affably. "But I am curious to know whether you noticed how the man who accosted you was dressed."

Frances turned her smile upon Ellery, who blinked quite humanly. "I didn't take particular notice of his clothes, Mr. Queen," she said, displaying white, brilliant teeth. "But I seem to remember his wearing a full-dress suit—his shirt-bosom was a little stained—they were like liquor-stains—and a top hat. From what I recall of his attire, it was rather fastidious and in good taste, except, of course, for the stains on his shirt."

Ellery murmured a fascinated thanks and subsided against the bookcase. With a sharp look at his son, Queen rose to his feet.

"Then that will be all, ladies and gentlemen. I think we may safely consider the incident closed."

There was an instantaneous little burst of approval and everybody rose to press in on Frances, who was radiant with happiness. Barry, Peale and Eve Ellis bore Frances off in triumphal march, while Stanford, with a lugubrious smile, offered his mother a carefully elbowed arm.

"Thus endeth the first lesson," he announced gravely. "Mater, my arm before you faint!" A protesting Mrs. Ives-Pope departed, leaning ponderously on her son.

Ives-Pope shook Queen's hand vigorously. "Then you think it's all over as far as my girl is concerned?" he asked.

"I think so, Mr. Ives-Pope," answered the Inspector. "Well, sir, thank you for your courtesy. And now we must be going—lots of work to do. Coming, Henry?"

Five minutes later Queen, Ellery and District Attorney Sampson were striding side by side down Riverside Drive toward 72nd Street, earnestly discussing the events of the morning.

"I'm glad that line of investigation is cleared up with no result," said Sampson dreamily. "By the Lord Harry, I admire that girl's pluck, Q!"

"Good child," said the Inspector. "What do you think, Ellery?" he asked suddenly, turning on his son, who was walking along staring at the River.

"Oh, she's charming," Ellery said at once, his abstracted eyes brightening.

"I didn't mean the girl, my son," said his father irritably. "I meant the general aspect of the morning's work."

"Oh, that!" Ellery smiled a little. "Do you mind if I become Æsopian?"

"Yes," groaned his father.

"A lion," said Ellery, "may be beholden to a mouse."

CHAPTER XIII

QUEEN TO QUEEN

DJUNA had just cleared the table of the dinner-dishes and was serving coffee to the two Queens at six-thirty that evening when the outer doorbell rang. The little man-of-all-work straightened his tie, pulled down his jacket (while the Inspector and Ellery eyed him in twinkling amusement), and marched gravely into the foyer. He was back in a moment bearing a silver tray upon which lay two calling-cards. The Inspector picked them up with beetling brows.

"Such ceremony, Djuna!" he murmured. "Well, well! So 'Doc' Prouty's bringing a visitor. Show 'em in, you imp!"

Djuna marched back and returned with the Chief Assistant Medical Examiner and a tall, thin, emaciated man, entirely bald and wearing a closely clipped beard. Queen and Ellery rose.

"I've been expecting to hear from you, Doc!" Queen grinned, shaking hands with Prouty. "And if I'm not mistaken, here's Professor Jones himself! Welcome to our castle, Doctor." The thin man bowed.

"This is my son and keeper of my conscience, Doctor," Queen added, presenting Ellery. "Ellery—Dr. Thaddeus Jones."

Dr. Jones offered a large limp hand. "So you're the chap Queen and Sampson keep prattling about!" he boomed. "Certainly happy to meet you, sir."

"I've been fairly itching to be introduced to New York City's Paracelsus and eminent Toxicologist," smiled Ellery.

"The honor of rattling the City's skeletons is all yours." He shuddered elaborately and indicated some chairs. The four men sat down.

"Join us in some coffee, gentlemen," urged Queen, and shouted to Djuna, whose bright eyes were visible from behind the kitchenette door. "Djuna! You rascal! Coffee for four!" Djuna grinned and disappeared, to pop out a moment later like a jack-in-the-box, bearing four cups of steaming coffee.

Prouty, who resembled the popular conception of Mephistopheles, whipped from his pocket one of his black, dangerous-looking cigars and began to puff away furiously.

"This chitter-chatter may be all right for you men of leisure," he said briskly, between puffs, "but I've been working like a beaver all day analyzing the contents of a lady's stomach, and I want to get home for some sleep."

"Hear, hear!" murmured Ellery, "I gather from your soliciting the aid of Professor Jones that you met with some obstruction in your analysis of Mr. Field's corporeal remains. Lay on, Æsculapius!"

"I'll lay on," returned Prouty grimly. "You're right—I met with a violent obstruction. I've had some little experience, if you'll pardon the professional modesty, in examining the innards of deceased ladies and gentlemen, but I'll confess I never saw 'em in such a mess as this chap Field's. Seriously, Jones will attest to the truth of *that*. His œsophagus, for example, and the entire tracheal tract looked as if some one had taken a blow-torch and played it gently over his insides."

"What was it—couldn't have been bichloride of mercury, could it, Doc?" asked Ellery, who prided himself on a complete ignorance of the exact sciences.

"Hardly," growled Prouty. "But let me tell you what happened. I analyzed for every poison on the calendar, and although this one had familiar petroleum components

I couldn't place it exactly. Yes, sir—I was stumped good and proper. And to let you in on a secret—the Medical Examiner himself, who thought I was pie-eyed from over-work, made a stab at it with his own fine Italian hand. The net result in his case, my boys, was zero. And the M. E.'s not exactly a novice either when it comes to chemical analysis. So we surrendered the problem to our fountain-head of learning. Let him spout his own story."

Dr. Thaddeus Jones cleared his throat forbiddingly. "Thank you, my friend, for a most dramatic introduction," he said in his deep lumbering voice. "Yes, Inspector, the remains were turned over to me, and in all seriousness, I want to say here and now that my discovery was the most startling the Toxicologist's office has made in fifteen years!"

"My, my!" murmured Queen, taking a pinch of snuff. "I'm beginning to respect the mentality of our friend the murderer. So many things point to the unusual lately! And what did you find, Doctor?"

"I took it for granted that Prouty and the Medical Examiner had done the preliminaries very well," began Dr. Jones, crossing his bony knees. "They generally do. And so, before doing anything else, I analyzed for the obscure poisons. Obscure, that is to say, from the standpoint of the criminal user. To show you how minutely I searched—I even thought of that favorite stand-by of our friends the fiction-writers: *curare*, the South American toxin which makes the grade in four out of five detective stories. But even that sadly abused member of the toxic family disappointed me. . . ."

Ellery leaned back and laughed. "If you're referring in a mildly satirical way to my profession, Dr. Jones, let me inform you that I have never used *curare* in any of my novels."

The toxicologist's eyes twinkled. "So you're one of

them, too, eh? Queen, old man," he added dolorously, turning to the Inspector, who was thoughtfully chewing on a piece of French pastry, "allow me to offer you my condolences. . . . At any rate, gentlemen, let me explain that in the case of rare poisons we can generally come to a definite conclusion without much trouble—that is, rare poisons that are in the pharmacopœia. Of course, there are any number of rare poisons of which we have no knowledge whatever—Eastern drugs particularly.

"Well, to make a long story short, I found myself faced with the unpleasant conclusion that I was up a tree." Dr. Jones chuckled in reminiscence. "It wasn't a pleasant conclusion. The poison I analyzed had certain properties which were vaguely familiar, as Prouty has said, and others which didn't jibe at all. I spent most of yesterday evening mulling over my retorts and test-tubes, and late last night I suddenly got the answer."

Ellery and Queen sat up straight and Dr. Prouty relaxed in his chair with a sigh, reaching for a second cup of coffee. The toxicologist uncrossed his legs, his voice booming more terrifyingly than ever.

"The poison that killed your victim, Inspector, is known as tetra ethyl lead!"

To a scientist this announcement, in Dr. Jones' profoundest tones, might have carried a dramatic quality. To the Inspector it meant less than nothing. As for Ellery, he murmured, "Sounds like a mythological monster to me!"

Dr. Jones went on, smiling. "So it hasn't impressed you much, eh? But let me tell you a little about tetra ethyl lead. It is almost colorless—to be more exact, it resembles chloroform in physical appearance. Point number one. Point number two—it has an odor—faint, to be sure—but distinctly like that of ether. Point number three—it is fearfully potent. So potent—but let me illustrate just

what this devilishly powerful chemical substance will do to living tissue."

By this time the toxicologist had gained the entire attention of his audience.

"I took a healthy rabbit, of the sort we use for experiment, and painted—just painted, mind you—the tender area behind the creature's ear with an undiluted dose of the stuff. Remember, this was not an internal injection. It was merely a painting of the skin. It would have to be absorbed through the dermis before it reached the blood-stream. I watched the rabbit for an hour—and after that I didn't have to watch him any more. He was as dead as any dead rabbit I ever saw."

"That doesn't seem so powerful to me, Doctor," protested the Inspector.

"It doesn't, eh? Well, take my word for it that it's extraordinary. For a mere daubing of whole, healthy skin—I tell you, I was astounded. If the skin had an incision of some sort, or if the poison were administered internally, that would be a different story. You can imagine, therefore, what happened to Field's insides when he *swallowed* the stuff—and he swallowed plenty!"

Ellery's brow was wrinkled in thought. He began to polish the lenses of his pince-nez.

"And that isn't all," resumed Dr. Jones. "As far as I know—and I have been in the service of the city for God knows how many years, and I've not kept uninformed about the progress of my science in other parts of the world, either—as far as I know, tetra ethyl lead has never before been used for criminal purposes!"

The Inspector drew up, startled. "That's saying something, Doctor!" he muttered. "Are you sure?"

"Positive. That's why I'm so keenly interested."

"Just how long would it take for this poison to kill a man, Doctor?" asked Ellery slowly.

Dr. Jones grimaced. "That's something I can't answer definitely, for the very good reason that to my knowledge no human being has ever died of its effects before. But I can make a fairly good guess. I can't conceive of Field having lived more than from fifteen to twenty minutes at the utmost after having taken the poison internally."

The silence that followed was broken by a cough from Queen. "On the other hand, Doctor, this very strangeness of the poison should make it fairly easy to trace. What, would you say, is its commonest source? Where does it come from? How would I go about getting it if I wanted some for a criminal purpose and didn't want to leave a trail?"

A gaunt smile lit up the features of the toxicologist. "The job of tracing this stuff, Inspector," he said fervently, "I'll leave to you. You can have it. Tetra ethyl lead, as far as I've been able to determine—remember, it is almost entirely new to us—occurs most commonly in certain petroleum products. I tinkered around quite a bit before I found the easiest way of making it in quantity. You'll never guess how it's done. It can be extracted from common, ordinary, everyday gasoline!"

The two Queens exclaimed under their breaths. "Gasoline!" cried the Inspector. "Why—how on earth could a man trace that?"

"That's the point," answered the toxicologist. "I could go to the corner gas-station, fill up the tank of my car, run it home, extract some of the gasoline from the tank, go into my laboratory and distill the tetra ethyl lead in remarkably little time with remarkably little effort!"

"Doesn't that imply, Doctor," put in Ellery hopefully, "that the murderer of Field had some laboratory experience—knew something about chemical analysis, and all that sort of rot?"

"No, it doesn't. Any man with a home-brew 'still' in

his house could distill that poison without leaving a trace. The beauty of the process is that the tetra ethyl lead in the gasoline has a higher boiling-point than any other of the fluid's constituents. All you have to do is distill everything out up to a certain temperature, and what's left is this poison."

The Inspector took a pinch of snuff with trembling fingers. "All I can say is—I take my hat off to the murderer," he muttered. "Tell me—Doctor—wouldn't a man have to know quite a bit about toxicology to possess such knowledge? How could he ever know this without some special interest—and therefore training—in the subject?"

Dr. Jones snorted. "Inspector, I'm surprised at you. Your question is already answered."

"How? What do you mean?"

"Haven't I just told you how to do it? And if you heard about the poison from a toxicologist, couldn't you make some provided you had the 'still'? You would require no knowledge except the boiling-point of tetra ethyl lead. Get along with you, Queen! You haven't a chance in the world of tracing the murderer through the poison. In all probability he overheard a conversation between two toxicologists, or even between two medical men who had heard about the stuff. The rest was easy. I'm not saying this is so. The man might be a chemist, at that. But I'm concerned only in giving you the possibilities."

"I suppose it was administered in whiskey, eh, Doctor?" asked Queen abstractedly.

"No doubt about it," returned the toxicologist. "The stomach showed a large whiskey content. Certainly, it would be an easy way for the murderer to slip it over on his victim. With the whiskey you get nowadays, most of it smells etherized, anyway. And besides, Field probably had it down before he realized anything was wrong—if he did at all."

"Wouldn't he taste the stuff?" asked Ellery wearily.

"I've never tasted it, young man, so I can't say definitely," answered Dr. Jones, a trifle tartly. "But I doubt whether he would—sufficiently to alarm him, at any rate. Once he had it down it wouldn't make any difference."

Queen turned to Prouty, whose cigar had gone out. He had fallen into a hearty doze. "Say, Doc!"

Prouty opened his eyes sleepily. "Where are my slippers—I can't ever seem to find my slippers, damn it!"

Despite the tension of the moment, there was a spontaneous roar of amusement at the expense of the Assistant Medical Examiner. When he had come to with sufficient thoroughness to understand what he had said, he joined the chuckling group and said, "Just goes to prove that I'd better be going home, Queen. What did you want to know?"

"Tell me," said Queen, still shaking, "what did you get from your analysis of the whiskey?"

"Oh!" Prouty sobered instantly. "The whiskey in the flask was as fine as any I've ever tested—and I've been doing nothing but testing booze for years now. It was the poison in the liquor on his breath that made me think at first that Field had drunk rotten booze. The Scotch and rye that you sent me in bottles from Field's apartment were also of the very highest quality. Probably the flask's contents came from the same place as the bottled stuff. In fact, I should say that both samples were imported goods. I haven't come across domestic liquor of that calibre ever since the War—that is, except for the pre-War stuff that was stored away. . . . And I suppose Velie communicated my report to you that the ginger ale is okay."

Queen nodded. "Well, that seems to settle it," he said heavily. "It looks as if we're up against a blank wall on this tetra ethyl lead business. But just to make sure, Doc

—work along with the professor here and try to locate a possible leak somewhere in the distribution of the poison. You fellows know more about that than anybody I could put on the case. It's just a stab in the dark and probably nothing will come of it."

"There's no question about it," murmured Ellery. "A novelist should stick to his last."

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"I think," remarked Ellery eagerly, after the two doctors had gone, "that I'll amble down to my bookseller for that Falconer." He rose and began a hasty search for his coat.

"Here!" bellowed the Inspector, pulling him down into a chair. "Nothing doing. That blasted book of yours won't run away. I want you to sit here and keep my headache company."

Ellery nestled into the leather cushions with a sigh. "Just when I get to feeling that all investigations into the foibles of the human mind are useless and a waste of time, my worthy sire puts the onus of thought upon me again. Heigh-ho! What's on the menu?"

"I'm not putting any onus on you at all," growled Queen. "And stop using such big words. I'm dizzy enough. What I want you to do is help me go over this confounded mess of a case and see—well, what we can see."

"I might have suspected it," said Ellery. "Where do I start?"

"You don't," grunted his father. "I'm doing the talking to-night and you're going to listen. And you might make a few notes, too."

"Let's begin with Field. I think, in the first place, that we can take it for granted our friend went to the Roman Theatre Monday night not for pleasure but for business. Right?"

"No doubt about it in my mind," said Ellery. "What did Velie report about Field's movements Monday?"

"Field got to his office at 9:30—his usual morning arrival-hour. He worked until noon. He had no personal visitors all day. At twelve o'clock he lunched at the Webster Club alone, and at 1:30 returned to his office. He worked steadily until 4:00—and seems to have gone straight home, as the doorman and elevator-man both testify he arrived at the apartment about 4:30. Velie could get no further data except that Michaels arrived at 5:00 and left at 6:00. Field left at 7:30, dressed as we found him. I have a list of the clients whom he saw during the day, but it doesn't tell much."

"How about the reason for his small bank account?" asked Ellery.

"Just what I figured," returned Queen. "Field has been losing steadily on the stock market—and not chicken feed, either. Velie's just run a little tip to earth which makes Field out as a frequent visitor to the racetrack, where he's also dropped plenty. For a shrewd man, he certainly was an easy-mark for the wisecracks. Anyway, that explains his having so little cash in his personal account. And more than that—it probably also explains more conclusively the item of '50,000' on the program we found. That meant money, and the money it referred to was in some way connected, I'm sure, with the person he was to meet at the theatre.

"Now, I think that we can pretty well conclude that Field knew his murderer rather intimately. For one thing, he accepted a drink obviously without suspicion, or at least question; for another, the meeting seems to have been definitely arranged for purposes of concealment—why, else, if that is not so, was the theatre chosen for the meeting at all?"

"All right. Let me ask you the same question," interposed Ellery, puckering his lips. "Why *should* a theatre be chosen as a meeting-place to transact a secret and undoubtedly nefarious business? Wouldn't a park be more secret? Wouldn't a hotel lobby have its advantages? Answer that."

"Unfortunately, my son," said the Inspector mildly, "Mr. Field could have had no definite knowledge that he was going to be murdered. As far as he was concerned, all he was going to do was to take care of his part of the transaction. As a matter of fact, Field *himself* might have chosen the theatre as the place of meeting. Perhaps he wanted to establish an alibi for something. There's no way of telling yet just what he wanted to do. As for the hotel lobby—certainly he would run a grave risk of being seen. He might have been unwilling, further, to risk himself in such a lonely place as a park. And, lastly, he may have had some particular reason for not wanting to be seen in the company of the second party. Remember—the ticket-stubs we found showed that the other person did not come into the theatre at the same time as Field. But this is all fruitless conjecture—"

Ellery smiled in a thoughtful manner, but said nothing. He was thinking to himself that the old man had not completely satisfied the objection, and that this was a strange thing in a man of Inspector Queen's direct habits of thought. . . .

But Queen was continuing. "Very well. We must always bear in mind the further possibility that the person with whom Field transacted his business was *not* his murderer. Of course, this is merely a possibility. The crime seems to have been too well planned for that. But if this *is* so, then we must look for *two* people in the audience Monday night who were directly connected with Field's death."

"Morgan?" asked Ellery idly.

The Inspector shrugged his shoulders. "Perhaps. Why didn't he tell us about it when we spoke to him yesterday afternoon? He confessed everything else. Well, maybe because he felt that a confession of having paid blackmail to the murdered man, together with the fact that he was found in the theatre, would be too damning a bit of circumstantial evidence."

"Look at it this way," said Ellery. "Here we find a man dead who has written on his program the number '50,000,' obviously referring to dollars. We know from what both Sampson and Cronin have told us about Field that he was a man of unscrupulous and probably criminal character. Further, we know from Morgan that he was also a blackmailer. I think, therefore, we can deduce safely that he went to the Roman Theatre on Monday night to collect or arrange for the payment of \$50,000 in blackmail from some person unknown. Right so far?"

"Go ahead," grunted the Inspector noncommittally.

"Very well," continued Ellery. "If we conclude that the person blackmailed that night and the murderer were one and the same, we need look no farther for a motive. There's the motive ready made—to choke off the blackmailing Field. *If*, however, we proceed on the assumption that the murderer and the person blackmailed were not the same, but two entirely different individuals, *then* we must still scrabble about looking for a motive for the crime. My personal opinion is that this is unnecessary—that the murderer and the blackmailed person are one. What do you think?"

"I'm inclined to agree with you, Ellery," said the Inspector. "I merely mentioned the other possibility—did not state my own conviction. Let us proceed, for the time being, then, on the assumption that Field's blackmail victim and his murderer were the same. . . .

"Now—I want to clear up the matter of the missing tickets."

"Ah—the missing tickets," murmured Ellery. "I was wondering what you made of that."

"Don't be funny, now, you rascal," growled Queen. "Here's what I make of it. All in all, we are dealing with eight seats—one in which Field sat, for which we have the stub found on Field's person; one in which the murderer sat, for which we have the stub found by Flint; and finally the six empty seats for which tickets were bought, as established by the box-office report, and for which stubs were not found, torn or whole, anywhere in the theatre or box-office. First of all, it is barely possible that all of those six whole tickets were in the theatre Monday night, and went out of the theatre on somebody's person. Remember, the search of individuals was necessarily not so exhaustive as to include an examination for small things like tickets. This, however, is highly improbable. The best explanation is that either Field or his murderer bought all eight tickets at one time, intending to use two and reserving the other six to insure absolute privacy during the short time that the business was to be transacted. In this case, the most sensible thing to have done was to destroy the tickets as soon as they were bought; which was probably done by either Field or the murderer, according to who made the arrangements. We must, therefore, forget those six tickets—they're gone and we'll never get our hands on them.

"To proceed," continued the Inspector. "We know that Field and his victim entered the theatre separately. This may positively be deduced from the fact that when I put the two stubs back to front, the torn edges did not match. When two people enter together, the tickets are presented together and are invariably torn together. Now—this does not say that they did not come in at prac-

tically the same time, because for purposes of safety they may have come in one after the other, as if they did not know each other. However, Madge O'Connell claims no one sat in LL30 during Act I, and the orangeade-boy, Jess Lynch, testified that ten minutes after Act II had started, there was still no one in LL30. This means that the murderer either had not yet entered the theatre, or he had come in before but was sitting in some other part of the orchestra, having a ticket necessarily for another seat."

Ellery shook his head. "I realize that as well as you, son," said the old man testily. "I'm just following the thought through. I was going to say that it doesn't seem likely the murderer had come into the theatre at the regular time. It's probable that he entered at least ten minutes after the second act started."

"I can give you a proof of that," said Ellery lazily.

The Inspector took a pinch of snuff. "I know—those cabalistic figures on the program. How did they read?

930

815

50,000

"We know what the fifty-thousand represented. The other two figures must have referred not to dollars, but to time. Look at the '815.' The play started at 8:25. In all likelihood Field arrived about 8:15, or if he arrived sooner, he had some cause to refer to his watch at that time. Now, if he had an appointment with some one who, we assume, arrived much later, what more likely than that Field should have idly jotted down on his program—first, the '50,000,' which indicates that he was thinking about the impending transaction, which involved \$50,000 in blackmail; then 8:15, the time he was thinking about it; and finally 9:30—the time the blackmail victim was due to arrive! It's the most natural thing in the world for Field to have done this, as it would be for any one

who is in the habit of scribbling in idle moments. It's very fortunate for us, because it points to two things: first, to the exact time of the appointment with the murderer—9:30; and, second, it corroborates our conjecture as regards the actual time the murder was committed. At 9:25 Lynch saw Field alive and alone; at 9:30, by Field's written evidence, the murderer was due to arrive, and we take it for granted he did; according to Dr. Jones' statement it would take the poison from fifteen to twenty minutes to kill Field—and in view of Pusak's discovery at 9:55 of the dead body, we may say that the poison was administered about 9:35. If the tetra ethyl lead took at the most twenty minutes—that gives us 9:55. Much before then, of course, the murderer left the scene of the crime. Remember—he could not have known that our friend Mr. Pusak would suddenly desire to rise and leave his seat. The murderer was probably figuring that Field's body would not be discovered until the intermission, at 10:05, which would have been ample time for Field to have died without being able to murmur any message at all. Luckily for our mysterious murderer Field was discovered too late to gasp more than the information that he'd been murdered. If Pusak had walked out five minutes earlier we'd have our elusive friend behind the bars right now."

"Bravo!" murmured Ellery, smiling affectionately. "A perfect recitation. My congratulations."

"Oh, go jump in the bath-tub," growled his father. "At this point I just want to repeat what you brought out Monday night in Panzer's office—the fact that although the murderer quitted the scene of the crime between 9:30 and 9:55, he was present in the theatre all the rest of the evening until we allowed everybody to go home. Your examination of the guards and the O'Connell girl, together with the doormen's evidence, Jess Lynch's

presence in the alley, the usher's corroboration of this fact and all the rest of it, takes care of that. . . . He was there, all right.

"This leaves us momentarily up a tree. All we can do now is consider some of the personalities we've bumped into in the course of the investigation," went on the Inspector with a sigh. "First—did Madge O'Connell tell the truth when she said she had seen no one pass up or down the aisle during the second act? And that she had not seen, at any time during the evening at all, the person whom we know sat in LL30 from half-past nine until ten or fifteen minutes before the body was discovered?"

"It's a tricky question, dad," remarked Ellery seriously, "because if she was lying about these things, we are losing a mine of information. If she *was* lying—good Lord!—she might be in a position at this moment either to describe, or identify, or possibly name the murderer! However, her nervousness and peculiar attitude might be ascribed to her knowledge that Parson Johnny was in the theatre, with a pack of policemen just aching to get their fingers on him."

"Sounds reasonable to me," grumbled Queen. "Well, what about Parson Johnny? How does he fit into this—or does he fit into it at all? We must always remember that, according to Morgan's statement, Cazzanelli was actively associated with Field. Field had been his lawyer, and perhaps had even bought the Parson's services for this shady business Cronin is nosing around about. If the Parson was not there by accident, was he there through Field or through Madge O'Connell, as she and he both say? I think, my son," he added with a fierce tug at his mustache, "that I'm going to give Parson Johnny a taste of the lash—it won't hurt his thick hide! And that snippy little O'Connell chit—won't do any harm to scare the wits out of her either. . . ."

He took an enormous pinch of snuff, sneezing to the tune of Ellery's sympathetic chuckles.

"And dear old Benjamin Morgan," continued the Inspector, "was he telling the truth about the anonymous letter which so conveniently gave him a mysterious source for his theatre ticket?"

"And that most interesting lady, Mrs. Angela Russo. . . . Ah, the ladies, bless 'em! They always muddle a man's logic so. What did she say—that she came to Field's apartment at 9:30? Is her alibi perfectly sound? Of course, the doorman at the apartment house confirmed her statement. But it's easy to 'fix' doormen. . . . Does she know more than she has indicated about Field's business—particularly his private business? Was she lying when she said that Field told her he would be back at ten o'clock? Remember, we know that Field had an appointment in the Roman Theatre beginning at 9:30—did he really expect to keep it and be back at his rooms by ten o'clock? By cab it would be a fifteen or twenty-minute drive, through traffic, which would leave only ten minutes for the transaction—possible, of course. Couldn't do it much sooner by subway, either. We mustn't forget, too, that this woman was not in the theatre at any time during the evening."

"You'll have your hands full with that fair flower of Eve," remarked Ellery. "It's so beautifully evident that she's keeping back a story of some sort. Did you notice that brazen defiance? Wasn't mere bravado. She knows something, dad. I would certainly keep my eye on her—sooner or later she'll give herself away."

"Hagstrom will take care of her," said Queen abstractedly. "Now, how about Michaels? He has no supported alibi for Monday evening. But then it might not make any difference. He wasn't in the theatre. . . . There's something fishy about that fellow. Was he really look-

ing for something when he came to Field's apartment Tuesday morning? We've made a thorough search of the premises—is it possible we've overlooked something? It's quite evident that he was lying when he spilled that story about the check, and not knowing that Field was dead. And consider this—he *must* have realized that he was running into danger in coming to Field's rooms. He'd read about the murder and couldn't have hoped that the police would delay going to the place. So he was taking a desperate chance—for what reason? Answer that one!"

"It might have had something to do with his imprisonment—by George, he looked surprised when I accused him, didn't he?" chuckled Ellery.

"Might at that," returned the Inspector. "By the way, I've heard from Velie about Michaels' term up in Elmira. Thomas reports that it was a hushed-up case—much more serious than the light sentence in the Reformatory indicates. Michaels was suspected of forgery—and it looked mighty black for him. Then Lawyer Field nicely got Mr. Michaels off on an entirely different count—something to do with petty larceny—and nothing was ever heard about the forgery business again. This boy Michaels looks like the real thing—have to step on his heels a bit."

"I have a little idea of my own about Michaels," said Ellery thoughtfully. "But let it go for the present."

Queen seemed not to hear. He stared into the fire roaring in the stone fireplace. "There's Lewin, too," he said. "Seems incredible that a man of Lewin's stamp should have been so confidentially associated with his employer without knowing a good deal more than he professes. Is he keeping something back? If he is, heaven help him—because Cronin will just about pulverize him!"

"I rather like that chap Cronin," sighed Ellery. "How on earth can a fellow be so set on one idea? . . . Has this occurred to you? I wonder if Morgan knows Angela

Russo? Despite the fact that both of them deny a mutual acquaintance. Would be deucedly interesting if they did, wouldn't it?"

"My son," groaned Queen, "don't go looking for trouble. We've a peck of it now without going out of our way for more. . . . By jingo!"

There was a comfortable silence as the Inspector sprawled in the light of the leaping flames. Ellery munched contentedly on a succulent piece of pastry. Djuna's bright eyes gleamed from the far corner of the room, where he had stolen noiselessly and squatted on his thin haunches on the floor, listening to the conversation.

Suddenly the old man's eyes met Ellery's in a spasmodic transference of thought.

"The hat . . ." muttered Queen. "We always come back to the hat."

Ellery's glance was troubled. "And not a bad thing to come back to, dad. Hat—hat—hat! Where does it fit in? Just what do we know about it?"

The Inspector shifted in his chair. He crossed his legs, took another pinch of snuff and proceeded with a fresh vigor. "All right. We can't afford to be lazy in the matter of that blamed silk-topper," he said briskly. "What do we know so far? First, that the hat did not leave the theatre. It seems funny, doesn't it? Doesn't seem possible that we would find no trace at all after such a thorough search. . . . Nothing was left in the cloak-room after everybody was gone; nothing was found in the sweepings that might indicate a hat torn to small pieces or burned; in fact, not a trace, not a thing for us to go on. Therefore, Ellery, the only sensible conclusion we can make at this point is *that we haven't looked for the hat in the right place!* And further, wherever it is, it's still there, due to our precaution of closing the theatre down since Monday night. Ellery, we've got to go back to-

morrow morning and turn that place upside down. I won't sleep until we see light somewhere in this matter."

Ellery was silent. "I'm not at all satisfied with things as you've stated them, dad," he muttered at last. "Hat—hat—there's something wrong somewhere!" He fell silent once more. "No! The hat is the focal point of this investigation—I cannot see any other way out of it. Solve the mystery of Field's hat and you will find the one essential clue that will point to the murderer. I'm so convinced of this that I'll be satisfied we're on the right track only when we're making progress in the explanation of the hat."

The old man nodded his head vigorously. "Ever since yesterday morning, when I had time to think over the hat business, I've felt that we had gone astray somewhere. And here it is Wednesday night—still no light. We've done necessary things—they've led nowhere. . . ." He stared into the fire. "Everything is so badly muddled. I've got all the loose ends at my fingertips, but for some blasted reason I can't seem to make them cohere—fit together—*explain* anything. . . . Undoubtedly, son, what is missing is the story of the top-piece."

The telephone bell rang. The Inspector sprang for the instrument. He listened attentively to a man's unhurried tones, made a brisk comment and finally hung up.

"Who's the latest midnight babbler, O recipient of many confidences?" asked Ellery, grinning.

"That was Edmund Crewe," said Queen. "You remember I asked him yesterday morning to go over the Roman. He spent all of yesterday and today at it. And he reports positively that there is no secret hiding-place anywhere on the premises of the theatre. If Eddie Crewe, who is about the last word in architectural matters of this kind, says there's no hiding-place there, you may rest assured it's so."

He jumped to his feet and espied Djuna squatting on his hams in the corner. "Djuna! Get the old bed ready," he roared. Djuna slipped through the room and disappeared with a silent grin. Queen wheeled on Ellery, who had already taken off his coat and was fumbling with his tie.

"The first thing we do to-morrow morning is go down to the Roman Theatre and start all over again!" the old man said decisively. "And let me tell you, son—I'm through fooling around! Somebody'd better watch out!"

Ellery affectionately encircled his father's shoulders with one great arm. "Come on to bed, you old fraud!" he laughed.

PART THREE

"A good detective is born, not made. Like all genius, he springs not from a carefully nurtured polizei but from all mankind. The most amazing detective I ever knew was a dirty old witch-doctor who had never been out of the bush. . . . It is the peculiar gift of the truly great detective that he can apply to the inexorable rules of logic three catalyzers: an abnormal observation of events, a knowledge of the human mind and an insight into the human heart."

—From THE MAN-HUNTER'S MANUAL,
By James Redix (the Younger).

CHAPTER XIV

IN WHICH THE HAT GROWS

ON Thursday, September 27th, the third morning after the events of the crime in the Roman Theatre, Inspector Queen and Ellery rose at an early hour and dressed hastily. They repaired to a makeshift breakfast under the protesting eye of Djuna, who had been pulled bodily from his bed and thrust into the sober habiliments which he affected as major-domo of the Queen ménage.

While they were munching at anæmic pancakes, the old man asked Djuna to get Louis Panzer on the telephone.

In a few moments the Inspector was speaking genially into the mouthpiece. "Good morning, Panzer. Please forgive me for hauling you out of bed at this ungodly time of the morning. . . . There's something important in the wind and we need your help."

Panzer murmured a sleepy reassurance.

"Can you come down to the Roman Theatre right away and open it for us?" went on the old man. "I told you that you wouldn't be shut down very long and now it looks as if you'll be able to cash in on the publicity the affair has been getting. I'm not sure when we can reopen, you understand, but it's barely possible that you'll be able to put your show on to-night. Can I count on you?"

"This is excellent!" Panzer's voice came over the wire in a tremulous eagerness. "Do you want me to come down to the theatre at once? I'll be there in a half-hour—I'm not dressed."

"That will be fine," returned Queen. "Of course, Panzer—no one is to be allowed inside yet. Wait for us

on the sidewalk before you use your keys and don't notify any one, either. We'll talk it all over at the theatre. . . . Just a moment."

He clamped the mouthpiece against his chest and looked up inquiringly at Ellery, who was gesturing frantically. Ellery formed his lips around the syllables of a name and the old man nodded approvingly. He spoke into the telephone again.

"There's one other thing you can do for me at present, Panzer," he continued. "Can you get hold of that nice old lady, Mrs. Phillips? I'd like to have her meet us at the theatre as soon as she can."

"Certainly, Inspector. If it's at all possible," said Panzer. Queen replaced the receiver on its hook.

"Well, that's that," he remarked, rubbing his hands together and delving into his pocket for the snuff-box. "Ah-h-h! Bless Sir Walter and all those hardy pioneers who championed the cause of the filthy weed!" He sneezed joyously. "One minute, Ellery, then we'll go."

He picked up the telephone once more and called detective headquarters. He gave a few cheery orders, banged the instrument back on the table and hustled Ellery into his coat. Djuna watched them leave with a mournful expression: he had often pleaded with the Inspector to be allowed to accompany the Queens on their sporadic excursions into the byways of New York. The Inspector, who had his own ideas on the subject of rearing adolescents, invariably refused. And Djuna, who regarded his patron much as the Stone-Age man regarded his amulets, accepted the inevitable and hoped for a more auspicious future.

It was a raw, wet day. Ellery and his father turned up their coat-collars as they walked towards Broadway and the subway. Both were extraordinarily taciturn, but the keen anticipatory looks on their faces—so curiously

alike and yet so different—portended an exciting and revealing day.

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Broadway and its threaded canyons were deserted in the chill wind of the morning as the two men walked briskly down 47th Street towards the Roman Theatre. A drab-coated man lounged on the sidewalk before the closed glass doors of the lobby; another leaned comfortably against the high iron fence which cut off the left alley from the street. The dumpy form of Louis Panzer was visible standing before the central door of the theatre, in conversation with Flint.

Panzer shook hands excitedly. "Well, well!" he cried. "So the ban is to be lifted at last! . . . Exceedingly happy to hear that, Inspector."

"Oh, it isn't exactly lifted, Panzer," smiled the old man. "Have you the keys? Morning, Flint. Rest up any since Monday night?"

Panzer produced a heavy bunch of keys and unlocked the central door of the lobby. The four men filed in. The swarthy manager fumbled with the lock of the inside door and finally managed to swing it open. The dark interior of the orchestra yawned in their faces.

Ellery shivered. "With the possible exceptions of the Metropolitan Opera House and Titus' Tomb, this is the most dismal theatorium I've ever entered. It's a fitting mausoleum for the dear departed. . . ."

The more prosaic Inspector grunted as he pushed his son into the maw of the dark orchestra. "Get along with you! You'll be giving us all the 'willies.'"

Panzer, who had hurried ahead, turned on the main electric switch. The auditorium leaped into more familiar outlines by the light of the big arcs and chandeliers. Ellery's fanciful comparison was not so fantastic as his father

had made it appear. The long rows of seats were draped with dirty tarpaulin; murky shadows streaked across the carpets, already dusty; the bare whitewashed wall at the rear of the empty stage made an ugly splotch in the sea of red plush.

"Sorry to see that tarpaulin there," grumbled the Inspector to Panzer. "Because it will have to be rolled up. We're going to conduct a little personal search of the orchestra. Flint, get those two men outside, please. They may as well do something to earn the City's money."

Flint sped away and returned shortly with the two detectives who had been on guard outside the theatre. Under the Inspector's direction they began to haul the huge sheets of rubberized seat-covers to the sides, disclosing rows of cushioned chairs. Ellery, standing to one side near the extreme left aisle, withdrew from his pocket the little book in which he had scribbled notes and drawn a rough map of the theatre on Monday night. He was studying this and biting his underlip. Occasionally he looked up as if to verify the lay-out of the theatre.

Queen bustled back to where Panzer was nervously pacing the rear. "Panzer, we're going to be mighty busy here for a couple of hours and I was too short-sighted to bring extra men with me. I wonder if I may impose upon you. . . . I have something in mind that requires immediate attention—it would take only a small part of your time and it would help me considerably."

"Of course, Inspector!" returned the little manager. "I'm only too glad to be of assistance."

The Inspector coughed. "Please don't feel that I'm using you as an errand-boy or anything like that, old man," he explained apologetically. "But I need these fellows, who are trained in searches of this kind—and at the same time I must have some vital data from a couple of the District Attorney's men who are working down-

town on another aspect of the case. Would you mind taking a note for me to one of them—name of Cronin—and bring back the parcel he gives you? I hate to ask you to do this, Panzer,” he muttered. “But it’s too important to trust to an ordinary messenger, and—ding it all! I’m in a hole.”

Panzer smiled in his quick birdlike fashion. “Not another word, Inspector. I’m entirely at your service. I’ve the materials in my office if you care to write the note now.”

The two men retired to Panzer’s office. Five minutes later they reëntered the auditorium. Panzer held a sealed envelope in his hand and hurried out into the street. Queen watched him go, then turned with a sigh to Ellery, who had perched himself on the arm of the seat in which Field had been murdered and was still consulting the penciled map.

The Inspector whispered a few words to his son. Ellery smiled and clapped the old man vigorously on the back.

“What do you say we get a move on, son?” said Queen. “I forgot to ask Panzer if he had succeeded in reaching this Mrs. Phillips. I guess he did, though, or he would have said something about it. Where in thunder is she?”

He beckoned to Flint, who was helping the other two detectives in the back-breaking task of removing the tarpaulin.

“I’ve one of those popular bending-exercises for you this morning, Flint. Go up to the balcony and get busy.”

“What am I supposed to be looking for to-day, Inspector?” grinned the broad-shouldered detective. “Because I hope I have better luck than I did Monday night.”

“You’re looking for a hat—a nice, shiny top-piece such as the swells wear, my boy,” announced the Inspector. “But if you should come across anything else, use your lungs!” Flint trotted up the wide marble staircase to-

wards the balcony. Queen looked after him, shaking his head. "I'm afraid the poor lad is doomed to another disappointment," he remarked to Ellery. "But I must make absolutely certain that there's nothing up there—and that the usher Miller who was guarding the balcony staircase Monday night was telling the truth. Come along, lazybones."

Ellery shed his topcoat reluctantly and tucked the little book away in his pocket. The Inspector wriggled out of his ulster and preceded his son down the aisle. Working side by side they began to search the orchestra-pit at the extreme end of the auditorium. Finding nothing there, they clambered out into the orchestra again and, Ellery taking the right side and his father the left, began a slow, methodical combing of the theatre-premises. They lifted the seats; probed experimentally into the plush cushions with long needles which the Inspector had produced mysteriously from his breast-pocket; and kneeled to examine every inch of the carpet by the light of electric torches.

The two detectives who had by now completed the task of rolling up the tarpaulin began, on the Inspector's brief command, to work through the boxes, a man to each side of the theatre.

For a long time the four men proceeded in silence, unbroken except for the somewhat labored breathing of Inspector Queen. Ellery was working swiftly and efficiently, the old man more slowly. As they met near the center after completing the search of a row, they would regard each other significantly, shake their heads and continue afresh.

About twenty minutes after Panzer's departure the Inspector and Ellery, absorbed in their examination, were startled by the ringing of a telephone bell. In the silence of the theatre the clear trill of the bell rang out with astonishing sharpness. Father and son looked at each other

blankly for an instant, then the old man laughed and plodded up the aisle in the direction of Panzer's office.

He returned shortly, smiling. "It was Panzer," he announced. "Got down to Field's office and found the place closed. No wonder—it's only a quarter of nine. But I told him to wait there until Cronin comes. It can't be long now."

Ellery laughed and they set to work again.

Fifteen minutes later, when the two men were almost finished, the front door opened and a small elderly woman dressed in black stood blinking in the brilliant arc-lights. The Inspector sprang forward to meet her.

"You're Mrs. Phillips, aren't you?" he cried warmly. "It's mighty nice of you to come so soon, madam. I think you know Mr. Queen here?"

Ellery came forward, smiling one of his rare smiles and bowing with genuine gallantry. Mrs. Phillips was representative of a lovable old womanhood. She was short and of motherly proportions. Her gleaming white hair and air of kindness endeared her immediately to Inspector Queen, who had a sentimental weakness for middle-aged ladies of presence.

"I certainly do know Mr. Queen," she said, extending her hand. "He was very nice to an old woman Monday night. . . . And I was so afraid you'd have to wait for me, sir!" she said softly, turning to the Inspector. "Mr. Panzer sent a messenger for me this morning—I haven't a telephone, you see. There was a time, when I was on the stage. . . . I came just as soon as I could."

The Inspector beamed. "For a lady it was remarkably prompt, remarkably prompt, Mrs. Phillips!"

"My father kissed the Blarney Stone several centuries ago, Mrs. Phillips," said Ellery gravely. "Don't believe a word av 'im. . . . I suppose it will be *au fait* if I leave you to tackle the rest of the orchestra, dad? I'd like to

have a little chat with Mrs. Phillips. Do you think you're physically able to complete the job alone?"

"Physically able—!" snorted the Inspector. "You plump right down that aisle and go about your business, son. . . . I should appreciate your giving Mr. Queen all the help you can, Mrs. Phillips."

The white-haired lady smiled and Ellery, taking her arm, led her off in the direction of the stage. Inspector Queen, looking after them wistfully, shrugged his shoulders after a moment and turned back to resume the search. A short time later, when he chanced to straighten up, he espied Ellery and Mrs. Phillips seated on the stage conversing earnestly, like two players rehearsing their rôles. Queen proceeded slowly up and down the rows, weaving in and out among the empty seats, shaking his head dolefully as he approached the last few rows still empty-handed. When he looked up again the two chairs on the stage held no occupants. Ellery and the old lady had disappeared.

Queen came at last to LL32 Left—the seat in which Monte Field had died. He made a painstaking examination of the cushions, a light of resignation in his eyes. Muttering to himself he walked slowly across the carpet at the rear of the theatre and entered Panzer's office. A few moments later he reappeared, only to make his way to the cubicle which was used as an office by the publicity man, Harry Neilson. He was in this compartment for some time. He came out and visited the cashiers' offices. Shutting the door behind him when he had finished, he wended his way down the steps on the right of the theatre leading to the general lounge, on the floor below the orchestra. Here he took his time, delving into every corner, every niche in the wall, every waste-container—all of which he found to be empty. He speculatively eyed the large bin standing directly under the water-fountain. He peered

into this receptacle and pottered away, finding nothing. Thereupon with a sigh he opened the door on which was gilt-lettered, LADIES' REST ROOM, and went inside. A few moments later he reappeared to push his way through the swinging-doors marked GENTLEMEN.

When his meticulous search of the lower floor was completed he trudged up the steps again. In the orchestra he found Louis Panzer waiting, slightly flushed from his exertions but displaying a triumphant smile. The little manager was carrying a small parcel wrapped in brown paper.

"So you saw Cronin after all, Panzer?" said the Inspector, scurrying forward. "This is mighty nice of you, my boy—I appreciate it more than I can say. Is this the package Cronin gave you?"

"It is. A very nice chap, Cronin. I didn't have to wait long after I telephoned you. He came in with two other men named Stoates and Lewin. He didn't keep me more than ten minutes altogether. I hope it was important, Inspector?" Panzer continued, smiling. "I should like to feel that I've been instrumental in clearing up part of the puzzle."

"Important?" echoed the Inspector, taking the parcel from the manager's hand. "You have no idea how important it is. Some day I'll tell you more about it. . . . Will you excuse me a moment, Panzer?"

The little man nodded in a fleeting disappointment as the Inspector grinned, backing off into a dark corner. Panzer shrugged and disappeared into his office.

When he came out, hat and coat left behind, the Inspector was stuffing the parcel into his pocket.

"Did you get what you wanted, sir?" inquired Panzer.

"Oh, yes, yes, indeed!" Queen said, rubbing his hands. "And now—I see Ellery is still gone—suppose we go into your office for a few minutes and while away the time until he returns."

They went into Panzer's sanctum and sat down. The manager lit a long Turkish cigarette while the Inspector dipped into his snuff-box.

"If I'm not presuming, Inspector," said Panzer casually, crossing his short fat legs and emitting a cloud of smoke, "how are things going?"

Queen shook his head sadly. "Not so well—not so well. We don't seem to be getting anywhere with the main angles of the case. In fact, I don't mind telling you that unless we get on the track of a certain object we face failure. . . . It's pretty hard on me—I've never encountered a more puzzling investigation." He wore a worried frown as he snapped the lid of his snuff-box shut.

"That's too bad, Inspector," Panzer clucked in sympathy. "And I was hoping— Ah, well! We can't put our personal concerns above the demands of justice, I suppose! Just what is it you are seeking, Inspector, if you don't mind telling an outsider?"

Queen brightened. "Not at all. You've done me a good turn this morning and— By jingo, how stupid of me not to think of this before!" Panzer leaned forward eagerly. "How long have you been manager of the Roman Theatre, Panzer?"

The manager raised his eyebrows. "Ever since it was built," he said. "Before that I managed the old Electra on 43rd Street—it is also owned by Gordon Davis," he explained.

"Oh!" The Inspector seemed to reflect deeply. "Then you would know this theatre from top to bottom—you would be as familiar with its construction as the architect, perhaps?"

"I have a rather thorough knowledge of it, yes," confessed Panzer, leaning back.

"That's excellent! Let me give you a little problem, then, Panzer. . . . Suppose you wished to conceal a—

let us say, a tophat—somewhere in the building, in such a way that not even an exhaustive search of the premises would bring it to light. What would you do? Where would you hide it?"

Panzer scowled thoughtfully at his cigarette. "A rather unusual question, Inspector," he said at last, "and one which it is not easy to answer. I know the plans of the theatre very well; I was consulted about them in a conference with the architect before the theatre was built. And I can positively state that the original blueprints did not provide for such medieval devices as concealed passageways, secret closets or anything of that sort. I could enumerate any number of places where a man might hide a comparatively small object like a tophat, but none of them would be proof against a really thorough search."

"I see." The Inspector squinted at his finger-nails in an appearance of disappointment. "So that doesn't help. We've been over the place from top to bottom, as you know, and we can't find a trace of it. . . ."

The door opened and Ellery, a trifle begrimed but wearing a cheerful smile, entered. The Inspector glanced at him in eager curiosity. Panzer rose hesitantly with the evident intention of leaving father and son alone. A flash of intelligence shot between the Queens.

"It's all right, Panzer—don't go," said the Inspector peremptorily. "We've no secrets from you. Sit down, man!"

Panzer sat down.

"Don't you think, dad," remarked Ellery, perching on the edge of the desk and reaching for his pince-nez, "that this would be an opportune moment to inform Mr. Panzer of to-night's opening? You remember we decided while he was gone that the theatre might be thrown open to the public this evening and a regular performance given. . . ."

"How could I have forgotten—!" said the Inspector

without blinking, although this was the first time he had heard about the mythical decision. "I think we're about ready, Panzer, to lift the ban on the Roman. We find that we can do nothing further here, so there is no reason for depriving you of your patronage any longer. You may run a performance to-night—in fact, we are most anxious to see a show put on, aren't we, Ellery?"

"'Anxious' is hardly the word," said Ellery, lighting a cigarette. "I should say we insist upon it."

"Exactly," murmured the Inspector severely. "We insist upon it, Panzer."

The manager had bobbed out of his chair, his face shining. "That's simply splendid, gentlemen!" he cried. "I'll telephone Mr. Davis immediately to let him know the good news. Of course"—his face fell—"it's terribly late to expect any sort of response from the public for to-night's performance. Such short notice. . . ."

"You needn't worry about that, Panzer," retorted the Inspector. "I've caused your shut-down and I'll see that the theatre is compensated for it to-night. I'll get the newspaper boys on the wire and ask them to ballyhoo the opening in the next edition. It will mean a lot of unexpected publicity for you and undoubtedly the free advertising, combined with the normal curiosity of the public, will give you a sell-out."

"That's sporting of you, Inspector," said Panzer, rubbing his hands. "Is there anything else I can do for you at the moment?"

"There's one item you've forgotten, dad," interposed Ellery. He turned to the swart little manager. "Will you see that LL32 and LL30 Left are not sold to-night? The Inspector and I would enjoy seeing this evening's performance. We've not really had that pleasure yet, you know. And naturally we wish to preserve a stately incognito, Panzer—dislike the adulation of the crowd and

that sort of thing. You'll keep it under cover, of course."

"Anything you say, Mr. Queen. I'll instruct the cashier to put aside those tickets," returned Panzer pleasantly. "And now, Inspector—you said you would telephone the press, I believe—?"

"Certainly." Queen took up the telephone and held pithy conversations with the city editors of a number of metropolitan newspapers. When he had finished Panzer bade them a hurried good-by to get busy with the telephone.

Inspector Queen and his son strolled out into the orchestra, where they found Flint and the two detectives who had been examining the boxes awaiting them.

"You men hang around the theatre on general principles," ordered the Inspector. "Be particularly careful this afternoon. . . . Any of you find anything?"

Flint scowled. "I ought to be digging clams in Canarsie," he said with a disgruntled air. "I fell down on the job Monday night, Inspector, and I'm blamed if I could find a thing for you to-day. That place upstairs is swept as clean as a hound's tooth. Guess I ought to go back to pounding a beat."

Queen slapped the big detective on the shoulder. "What's the matter with you? Don't be acting like a baby, lad. How on earth could you find anything when there wasn't anything to find? You fellows get something?" he demanded, swinging on the other two men.

They shook their heads in a gloomy negation.

A moment later the Inspector and Ellery climbed into a passing taxicab and settled back for the short drive to headquarters. The old man carefully closed the glass sliding-window separating the driver's seat from the interior of the car.

"Now, my son," he said grimly, turning on Ellery, who

was puffing dreamily at a cigarette, "please explain to your old daddy that hocus-pocus in Panzer's office!"

Ellery's lips tightened. He stared out of the window before replying. "Let me start this way," he said. "You have found nothing in your search to-day. Nor have your men. And although I scouted about myself, I was just as unsuccessful. Dad, make up your mind to this one primary point: The hat which Monte Field wore to the performance of 'Gunplay' on Monday night, in which he was seen at the beginning of the second act, and which presumably the murderer took away after the crime was committed, *is not in the Roman Theatre now and has not been there since Monday night.* To proceed." Queen stared at him with grizzled brows. "In all likelihood Field's tophat no longer exists. I would stake my Falconer against your snuff-box that it has fled this life and now enjoys a reincarnation as ashes in the City dumps. That's point number one."

"Go on," commanded the Inspector.

"Point number two is so elementary as to be infantile. Nevertheless, allow me the privilege of insulting the Queen intelligence. . . . If Field's hat is not in the Roman Theatre now and has not been in the Roman Theatre since Monday night, it must of necessity have been taken *out* of the Roman Theatre some time during the course of that evening!"

He paused to gaze thoughtfully through the window. A traffic-officer was waving his arms at the juncture of 42nd Street and Broadway.

"We have established therefore," he continued lightly, "the factual basis of a point which has been running us ragged for three days: to wit, did the hat for which we are looking leave the Roman Theatre. . . . To be dialectic—yes, it did. It left the Roman Theatre the night of the murder. Now we approach a greater problem—*how*

did it leave and *when*." He puffed at his cigarette and regarded the glowing tip. "We know that no person left the Roman Monday night with two hats or no hat at all. In no case was there anything incongruous in the attire of any person leaving the theatre. That is, a man wearing a full-dress costume did not go out with a fedora. In a similar way, no one wearing a silk-topper was dressed in ordinary street-clothes. Remember; we noticed nothing wrong from this angle in *anyone*. . . . This leads us inevitably, to my staggering mind, to the third fundamental conclusion: that Monte Field's hat left the theatre in the most natural manner in the world: *id est*, by way of some man's head, its owner being garbed in appropriate evening-clothes!"

The Inspector was keenly interested. He thought over Ellery's statement for a moment. Then he said seriously, "That's getting us somewhere, son. But you say a man left the theatre wearing Monte Field's hat—an important and enlightening statement. But please answer this question: What did he do with his own hat, since no one left with two?"

Ellery smiled. "You now have your hand on the heart of our little mystery, dad. But let it hold for the moment. We have a number of other points to mull over. For example, the man who departed wearing Monte Field's hat could have been only one of two things: either he was the actual murderer, or he was an accomplice of the murderer."

"I see what you're driving at," muttered the Inspector. "Go on."

"If he was the murderer, we have definitely established the sex and also the fact that our man was wearing evening-clothes that night—perhaps not a very illuminating point, since there were scores of such men in the theatre. If he was only an accomplice, we must conclude that the

murderer was one of two possibilities: either a man dressed in ordinary clothes, whose possession of a tophat as he left would be patently suspicious; or else a woman, who of course could not sport a tophat at all!"

The Inspector sank back into the leather cushions. "Talk about your logic!" he chortled. "My son, I'm almost proud of you—that is, I would be if you weren't so disgustingly conceited. . . . Things standing where they do, therefore, the reason you pulled your little drama in Panzer's office. . . ."

His voice lowered as Ellery leaned forward. They continued to converse in inaudible tones until the taxicab drew up before the headquarters building.

No sooner had Inspector Queen, who had proceeded blithely through the sombre corridors with Ellery striding at his side, entered his tiny office than Sergeant Velie lumbered to his feet.

"Thought you were lost, Inspector!" he exclaimed. "That Stoates kid was in here not long ago with a suffering look on his face. Said that Cronin was tearing his hair at Field's office—that they still hadn't found a thing in the files of an incriminating nature."

"Go away, go away, Thomas my lad," gurgled the Inspector softly. "I can't bother myself with petty problems like putting a dead man behind bars. Ellery and I—"

The telephone bell rang. Queen sprang forward and snatched the instrument from the desk. As he listened the glow left his thin cheeks and a frown settled once more on his forehead. Ellery watched him with a strange absorption.

"Inspector?" came the hurried voice of a man. "This is Hagstrom reporting. Just got a minute—can't say much. Been tailing Angela Russo all morning and had a tough time. . . . Seems to be wise that I'm following

her. . . . A half hour ago she thought she'd given me the slip—she hopped into a cab and beat it downtown. . . . And say, Inspector—just three minutes ago I saw her enter Benjamin Morgan's office!"

Queen barked, "Nail her the instant she comes out!" and slammed the receiver down. He turned slowly to Ellery and Velie and repeated Hagstrom's report. Ellery's face became a study in frowning astonishment. Velie appeared unmistakably pleased.

But the old man's voice was strained as he sat down weakly in his swivel-chair. Finally he groaned, "What do you know about that!"

CHAPTER XV

IN WHICH AN ACCUSATION IS MADE

DETECTIVE HAGSTROM was a phlegmatic man. He traced his ancestry to the mountains of Norway, where stolidity was a virtue and stoicism the ultimate cult. Nevertheless, as he leaned against a gleaming marble wall on the twentieth floor of the Maddern Building, thirty feet to the side of the bronze-and-glass door marked:

BENJAMIN MORGAN
Attorney-at-Law

his heart beat a trifle faster than usual. He shuffled his feet nervously as his jaw masticated a wad of chewing-tobacco. If the truth were told Detective Hagstrom, a man of varied experience in the service of the police department, had never clamped his hand on the shoulder of a female with intent to arrest. He faced his coming assignment therefore in some trepidation, remembering with appalling clarity the fiery temperament of the lady for whom he was waiting.

His apprehension was well founded. When he had been lounging in the corridor some twenty minutes, and wondering whether his quarry had not slipped away through another exit, Benjamin Morgan's office-door suddenly swung open and the large, curved figure of Mrs. Angela Russo, garbed in a modish tweed ensemble, appeared. An unbecoming snarl distorted her carefully made-up features; she swung her purse menacingly as she strode toward the line of elevators. Hagstrom glanced quickly at his wrist-watch. It was ten minutes to twelve.

In a short time the offices would be disgorging their occupants for the lunch hour, and he was most desirous of making his arrest in the quiet of the deserted hall.

Accordingly he straightened up, adjusted his orange-and-blue necktie and stepped with a fair assumption of coolness into full view of the approaching woman. As she caught sight of him she slackened her stride perceptibly. Hagstrom hurried toward her, anticipating flight. But Mrs. Angela Russo was made of sterner stuff. She tossed her head and came on brazenly.

Hagstrom fixed his large red hand on her arm. "I guess you know what I want you for," he said fiercely. "Come along now, and don't make a fuss or I'll put the nippers on you!"

Mrs. Russo shook off his hand. "My, my—aren't you the big rough cop?" she murmured. "Just what do you think you're doing, anyway?"

Hagstrom glared. "None o' your lip, now!" His finger pressed savagely on the "Down" signal for the elevators. "You just shut up and come along!"

She faced him sweetly. "Are you trying to arrest me, by any chance?" she cooed. "Because you know, my big he-man, you've got to have a warrant to do that!"

"Aw, stow it!" he growled. "I'm not arresting you—I'm just inviting you to step down to headquarters for a little gab with Inspector Queen. You coming, or do I have to call the wagon?"

An elevator flashed to a stop. The elevator-man snapped, "Going down!" The woman glanced with momentary uncertainty at the car, peered slyly at Hagstrom and finally stepped into the elevator, the detective's hand firmly clasped on her elbow. They descended in silence under the curious scrutiny of several passengers.

Hagstrom, uneasy but determined, sensing somehow a storm brewing in the breast of the woman who strode

so calmly by his side, was taking no chances. He did not relax his grasp until they sat side by side in a taxicab, bound for headquarters. Mrs. Russo's face had gone pasty under her rouge, despite the bold smile curving her lips. She turned suddenly to face her captor, leaning close to his rigidly official body.

"Mr. Cop, darling," she whispered, "do you think you could use a hundred-dollar bill?"

Her hand fumbled suggestively in her purse. Hagstrom lost his temper.

"Bribery, huh?" he sneered. "We'll have to chalk that one up for the Inspector!"

The woman's smile faded. For the rest of the journey she sat looking fixedly at the back of the driver's neck.

It was only when she was being marched, like a soldier on parade, down the dark corridors of the big police structure that her poise returned. And when Hagstrom held open the door of Inspector Queen's office, she passed inside with an airy tilt to her head and a pleasant smile that would have deceived a police matron.

Inspector Queen's office was a cheery affair of sunlight and color. At the moment it resembled a clubroom. Ellery's long legs were stretched comfortably across the thick carpet, his eyes pleasantly absorbed in the contents of a small cheaply bound book entitled "The Complete Guide to Handwriting Analysis." The smoke of a cigarette curled from his slack fingers. Sergeant Velie was sitting stolidly in a chair against the far wall, engrossed in a contemplation of Inspector Queen's snuff-box, which was held lovingly between the thumb and forefinger of the old police official himself. Queen was seated in his comfortable armchair, smiling in hazy introspection at some secret thought.

"Ah! Mrs. Russo! Come in, come in!" exclaimed the Inspector, bouncing to his feet. "Thomas—a chair

for Mrs. Russo, if you please." The Sergeant silently placed one of the bare wooden chairs by the side of the Inspector's desk and as silently retreated to his corner. Ellery had not even glanced in the woman's direction. He read on, the same pleasantly abstracted smile on his lips. The old man was bowing with hospitable courtesy to Mrs. Russo.

She looked about at the peaceful scene with bewilderment. She had been prepared for severity, harshness, brutality—the domestic atmosphere of the little office took her completely by surprise. Nevertheless she seated herself and, the instant of hesitation gone, she exhibited the same agreeable smile, the same ladylike demeanor that she had practiced so successfully in the corridors.

Hagstrom was standing inside the doorway, glaring with offended dignity at the profile of the seated woman.

"She tried to slip me a century note," he said indignantly. "Tried to bribe me, Chief!"

Queen's eyebrows instantly rose in shocked surprise. "My dear Mrs. Russo!" he exclaimed in a sorrowful voice. "You really didn't intend to make this excellent officer forget his duty to the City, did you? But of course not! How stupid of me! Hagstrom, certainly you must be mistaken, my dear fellow. A hundred dollars—" He shook his head dolefully, sinking back into the leather swivel-chair.

Mrs. Russo smiled. "Isn't it queer how these cops get the wrong impression?" she asked in a lovely voice. "I assure you, Inspector—I was just having a little fun with him. . . ."

"Exactly," said the Inspector, smiling again, as if this statement restored his faith in human nature. "Hagstrom, that'll be all."

The detective, who was staring open-mouthed from his superior to the smiling woman, recovered in time to

intercept a wink which passed from Velie to Queen across the woman's head. He went out quickly, muttering to himself.

"Now, Mrs. Russo," began the Inspector, in a business-like tone, "what can we do for you to-day?"

She stared at him. "Why—why, I thought you wanted to see me. . . ." Her lips tightened. "Cut the comedy, Inspector!" she said shortly. "I'm not paying any social calls on my own hook to this place and you know it. What did you pinch me for?"

The Inspector spread his sensitive fingers deprecatingly, his mouth pursed in protest. "But, my dear lady!" he said. "Certainly you have something to tell me. Because, if you are here—and we cannot evade that evident fact—you are here for a reason. Granted that you did not come exactly of your own free will—still you were brought here because you have something to say to me. Don't you see?"

Mrs. Russo stared fixedly into his eyes. "What the—Hey, look here, Inspector Queen, what are you driving at? What do you think I've got to tell you? I answered everything you asked me Tuesday morning."

"Well!" The old man frowned. "Let us say that you did *not* answer every question Tuesday morning with absolute veracity. For example—do you know Benjamin Morgan?"

She did not flinch. "All right. You take the cake on that one. Your bloodhound caught me coming out of Morgan's office—what of it?" She deliberately opened her purse and began to dab powder on her nose. As she did so she glanced slyly at Ellery from the corner of her eye. He was still engrossed in his book, oblivious to her presence. She turned back to the Inspector with a toss of the head.

Queen was looking at her sadly. "My dear Mrs. Russo,

you're not being fair to a poor old man. I wanted merely to point out that you had—shall I say—lied to me the last time I spoke to you. Now that's a very dangerous procedure with police Inspectors, my dear—very dangerous."

"Listen here!" the woman said suddenly. "You're not going to get anywhere with this soft soap, Inspector. I *did* lie to you Tuesday morning. Because, you see, I didn't think you had anyone here who could follow me very long. Well, I took a gambler's chance and I lost. So you found out I was lying, and you want to know what it's all about. I'll tell you—and then maybe again I won't!"

"Oho!" exclaimed Queen softly. "So you feel you're in a safe enough position to dictate terms, eh? But Mrs. Russo—believe me you're putting your very charming neck into a noose!"

"Yeh?" The mask was fairly off now; the woman's face was stripped to its essential character of intrigue. "You got nothing on me and you know it damn' well. All right—I did lie to you—what are you going to do about it? I'm admitting it now. And I'll even tell you what I was doing in that guy Morgan's office, if that'll help you any! That's the kind of a square-shooter *I* am, Mr. Inspector!"

"My dear Mrs. Russo," returned the Inspector in a pained voice, a little puffed smile in his cheeks, "we know already what you were doing in Mr. Morgan's office this morning, so you won't be conferring such a great favor on us after all. . . . I'm really surprised that you should be willing to incriminate yourself to that extent, Mrs. Russo. Blackmail is a mighty serious offense!"

The woman grew deathly white. She half rose in the chair, gripping its arms.

"So Morgan squealed after all, the dirty dog!" she

snarled. "And I thought he was a wise guy. I'll give him something to squeal about, take it from me!"

"Ah, now you're beginning to talk my language," murmured the Inspector, leaning forward. "And just what is it you know about our friend Morgan?"

"I know this about him—but look here, Inspector, I can give you a red-hot tip. You wouldn't frame a poor lonely woman on a blackmail charge, would you?"

The Inspector's face lengthened. "Now, now, Mrs. Russo!" he said. "Is that a nice thing to say? Certainly I can't make any promises. . . ." He rose, his slender body deadly in its immobility. She shrank back a little. "You will tell me what you have on your mind, Mrs. Russo," he said deliberately, "on the bare chance that I may show my gratitude in the generally accepted fashion. You will please talk—truthfully, do you understand?"

"Oh, I know well enough you're a tough nut, Inspector!" she muttered. "But I guess you're fair, too. . . . What do you want to know?"

"Everything."

"Well, it isn't my funeral," she said, in a more composed voice. There was a pause while Queen examined her curiously. In accusing her of blackmailing Morgan he had made a successful stab in the dark; now a flash of doubt assailed him. She seemed much too sure of herself if all she knew were the details of Morgan's past, as the Inspector had taken for granted from the beginning of the interview. He glanced at Ellery and was apprehensively quick to note that his son's eyes were no longer on the book but riveted on the profile of Mrs. Russo.

"Inspector," said Mrs. Russo, a shrill triumph creeping into her voice, "I know who killed Monte Field!"

"What's that?" Queen jumped out of his seat, a flush suffusing his white features. Ellery had straightened convulsively in his chair, his sharp eyes boring into the

woman's face. The book he had been reading slipped out of his fingers and dropped to the floor with a thud.

"I said I know who killed Monte Field," repeated Mrs. Russo, evidently enjoying the sensation she had caused. "It's Benjamin Morgan, and I heard him threaten Monte *the night before he was murdered!*"

"Oh!" said the Inspector, sitting down. Ellery picked up his book and resumed his interrupted study of "The Complete Guide to Handwriting Analysis." Quiet descended once more. Velie, who had been staring at father and son in struggling amazement, seemed at a loss to understand their suddenly changed manner.

Mrs. Russo grew angry. "I suppose you think I'm lying again, but I'm not!" she screamed. "I tell you I heard with my own ears Ben Morgan tell Monte Sunday night that he'd put him away!"

The Inspector was grave, but undisturbed. "I don't doubt your word in the least, Mrs. Russo. Are you sure it was Sunday night?"

"Sure?" she shrilled. "I'll say I'm sure!"

"And where did this happen?"

"Right in Monte Field's own apartment, that's where!" she said biting. "I was with Monte all evening Sunday, and as far I know he wasn't expecting company, because we didn't usually have company when we spent the evening together. . . . Monte himself jumped when the door-bell rang about eleven o'clock and said, 'Who in hell could that be?' We were in the living-room at the time. But he got up and went to the door, and right after that I heard a man's voice outside. I figured Monte wouldn't want me to be seen by anybody, so I went into the bedroom and closed the door, just leaving a crack open. I could hear Monte trying to stall the man off. Anyway, they finally came into the living-room. Through the crack in the door I saw it was this fellow Morgan—I didn't

know who he was at the time, but later on I got it during the talk they had. And afterward Monte told me."

She stopped. The Inspector listened imperturbably and Ellery was paying not the slightest attention to her words. She went on desperately.

"For about a half hour they talked till I could have howled. Morgan was sort of cold and set; he didn't get excited till the last. From which I gathered, Monte had asked Morgan not long before for a big wad of dough in return for some papers; and Morgan said he didn't have the money, couldn't raise it. Said he'd decided to drop into Monte's place for one last reckoning. Monte was kind of sarcastic and mean—he could be awfully mean when he wanted to. Morgan kept getting madder and madder, and I could see he was holding his temper in. . . ."

The Inspector interrupted. "Just what was the reason for Field's demand for money?"

"I wish I knew, Inspector," she returned savagely. "But both of 'em were mighty careful not to mention the reason. . . . Anyway, it was something about those papers that Monte wanted Morgan to buy. It wouldn't take much brains to guess that Monte had something on Morgan and was pushing it to the limit."

At the mention of the word "papers" Ellery's interest in Mrs. Russo's story had revived. He had put the book down and begun to listen intently. The Inspector gave him a fleeting glance as he addressed the woman.

"Just how much money was Field demanding, Mrs. Russo?"

"You wouldn't believe me if I told you," she said, laughing disdainfully. "Monte was no piker. All he wanted was—fifty thousand dollars!"

The Inspector seemed unmoved. "Go on."

"So there they were," she continued, "jabbering back and forth, with Monte getting colder and Morgan getting

madder. Finally Morgan picked up his hat and yelled, 'I'll be damned, you crook, if I'm going to be milked any more! You can do what you please—I'm through, do you understand? I'm through for good!' He was blue in the face. Monte didn't get up from his chair. He just said, 'You can do as you please, Benjamin my friend, but I give you exactly three days to hand that money over. And no bargaining, remember! Fifty thousand, or—but surely I don't have to remind you of the unpleasant consequences of refusal.' Monte sure was slick," she added admiringly. "Could sling the lingo like a professional.

"Morgan kept fiddling with his hat," she went on, "just as if he didn't know what to do with his hands. Then he exploded with, 'I told you where you get off, Field, and I mean every word of it. Publish those papers, and if it means ruin to me—I'll see to it that it's the last time you'll ever blackmail *anybody*!' He shook his fist under Monte's nose, and looked for a minute as if he was going to do him in then and there. Then all of a sudden he quieted down and without saying another word walked himself out of the apartment."

"And that's the story, Mrs. Russo?"

"Isn't it enough?" she flared. "What are you trying to do—protect that murdering coward? . . . But it isn't all. After Morgan left, Monte said to me, 'Did you hear why my friend said?' I made believe I didn't, but Monte was wise. He took me on his lap and said playfully, 'He'll regret it, Angel. . . .' He always called me Angel," she added coyly.

"I see. . . ." The Inspector mused. "And just what did Mr. Morgan say—that you took for a threat against Field's life?"

She stared at him incredulously. "Good gravy, are you dumb, or what?" she cried. "He said, 'I'll see to it it's the last time you'll ever blackmail *anybody*!' And then

when my darling Monte was killed the very next night. . . ."

"A very natural conclusion," smiled Queen. "Do I understand that you are preferring charges against Benjamin Morgan?"

"I'm not preferring anything except a little peace, Inspector," she retorted. "I've told you the story—now do what you want with it." She shrugged her shoulders and made as if to rise.

"One moment, Mrs. Russo." The Inspector held up a small and delicate finger. "You referred in your story to some 'papers' that Field was holding over Morgan's head. Did Field at any time during the quarrel between them actually bring out these papers?"

Mrs. Russo looked the old man coolly in the eye. "No sir, he didn't. And make believe I'm not sorry he didn't, too!"

"A charming attitude of yours, Mrs. Russo. One of these days. . . . I hope you understand that your skirts are not entirely—ah—clean in this matter, in a manner of speaking," said the Inspector. "So please consider very carefully before you answer my next question. Where did Monte Field keep his private documents?"

"I don't have to consider, Inspector," she snapped, "I just don't know. If there was any chance of my knowing I would, don't worry."

"Perhaps you made a few personal forays of your own when Field was absent from his apartment?" pursued Queen, smiling.

"Perhaps I did," she answered with a dimpling cheek. "But it didn't do any good. I'd swear they're not in those rooms. . . . Well, Inspector, anything else?"

The clear voice of Ellery seemed to startle her. But she coquettishly patted her hair as she turned towards him.

"As far as you know, Mrs. Russo," said Ellery icily,

"from long and no doubt intimate association with your gallant Leander—how many different silk tophats did he possess?"

"You're the original cross-word puzzle, aren't you?" she gurgled. "As far as I know, Mr. Man, he had only one. How many does a guy need?"

"You're certain of that, I suppose," said Ellery.

"Sure's you're born, Mr.—Queen." She contrived to slip a caress into her voice. Ellery stared at her as one stares at a strange zoölogical specimen. She made a little *moué* and turned about gayly.

"I'm not so popular around here so I'll beat it. . . . You're not going to put me in a nasty cell, are you, Inspector? I can go now, can't I?"

The Inspector bowed. "Oh yes—you may go, Mrs. Russo, under a certain amount of surveillance. . . . But please understand that we may still require your delightful company at some not distant date. Will you remain in town?"

"Charmed, I'm sure!" she laughed and swept out of the room.

Velie snapped to his feet like a soldier and said, "Well, Inspector, I guess that settles it!"

The Inspector sank wearily into his chair. "Are you insinuating, Thomas, like some of Ellery's stupid fiction-sergeants—which you are not—that Mr. Morgan be arrested for the murder of Monte Field?"

"Why—what else?" Velie seemed at a loss.

"We'll wait a while, Thomas," returned the old man heavily.

CHAPTER XVI

IN WHICH THE QUEENS GO TO THE THEATRE

ELLERY and his father regarded each other across the length of the little office. Velie had resumed his seat with a puzzled frown. He sat quietly for a time in the growing silence, seemed suddenly to make a decision and asking permission left the room.

The Inspector grinned as he fumbled with the lid of his snuff-box.

"Did you get a scare, too, Ellery?"

Ellery, however, was serious. "That woman gives me a case of Wodehouse 'willies,' " he said, shuddering. "Scare is much too mild a word."

"I couldn't for the moment grasp the significance of her attitude," said Inspector Queen. "To think that she *knew*, while we have been fumbling around. . . . It scattered my wits."

"I should say the interview was highly successful," commented Ellery. "Principally because I've been gathering a few interesting facts from this ponderous tome on chirography. But Mrs. Angela Russo does not measure up to my conception of perfect womanhood. . . ."

"If you ask me," chuckled the Inspector, "our beauteous friend has a crush on you. Consider the opportunities, my son—!"

Ellery made a grimace of profound distaste.

"Well!" Queen reached for one of the telephones on the desk. "Do you think we ought to give Benjamin Morgan another chance, Ellery?"

"Hanged if he deserves it," grumbled Ellery. "But I suppose it's the routine thing to do."

"You forget the papers, son—the papers," retorted the Inspector, a twinkle in his eye.

He spoke to the police operator in pleasant accents and a few moments later the buzzer sounded.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Morgan!" Queen said cheerfully. "And how are you to-day?"

"Inspector Queen?" asked Morgan after a slight hesitation. "Good afternoon to you, sir. How is the case progressing?"

"That's a fair question, Mr. Morgan," laughed the Inspector. "One, however, which I daren't answer for fear of being accused of incompetency. . . . Mr. Morgan, are you free this evening by any chance?"

Pause. "Why—not free exactly." The lawyer's voice was barely audible. "I am due at home, of course, for dinner, and I believe my wife has arranged a little bridge. Why, Inspector?"

"I was thinking of asking you to dine with my son and me this evening," said the Inspector regretfully. "Could you possibly get away for the dinner-hour?"

A longer pause. "If it's absolutely necessary, Inspector—?"

"I wouldn't put it that way exactly, Mr. Morgan. . . . But I would appreciate your accepting the invitation."

"Oh." Morgan's voice came more resolutely now. "In that case I'm at your command, Inspector. Where shall I meet you?"

"That's fine, that's fine!" said Queen. "How about Carlos', at six?"

"Very well, Inspector," returned the lawyer quietly and hung up the receiver.

"I can't help feeling sorry for the poor chap," murmured the old man.

Ellery grunted. He was not feeling inclined to sympathize. The taste of Mrs. Angela Russo was still strong in his mouth, and it was not a pleasant taste at all.

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Promptly at six o'clock Inspector Queen and Ellery joined Benjamin Morgan in the convivial atmosphere of Carlos' restaurant-foyer. He was sitting dejectedly in a red-leather chair, staring at the backs of his hands. His lips drooped sadly, his knees were widely separated in an instinctive attitude of depression.

He made a laudable attempt to smile as the two Queens approached. He rose with a firmness that indicated to his keen hosts a mind determined upon a fixed course of action. The Inspector was at his bubbling best, partly because he felt a genuine liking for the corpulent attorney and partly because it was his business. Ellery, as usual, was noncommittal.

The three men shook hands like old friends.

"Glad to see you're on time, Morgan," said the Inspector, as a stiff headwaiter conducted them to a corner-table. "I really must apologize for taking you away from your dinner at home. There was a time once—" He sighed and they sat down.

"No apology necessary," said Morgan with a wan smile. "I suppose you know that every married man relishes a bachelor dinner at times. . . . Just what is it, Inspector, you wanted to talk to me about?"

The old man raised a warning finger. "No business now, Morgan," he said. "I have an idea Louis has something up his sleeve in the way of solid refreshment—right, Louis?"

The dinner was a culinary delight. The Inspector, who was quite indifferent to the nuances of the art, had left the details of the menu to his son. Ellery was fanatically

interested in the delicate subject of foods and their preparation. Consequently the three men dined well. Morgan was at first inclined to taste his food abstractedly, but he became more and more alive to the delightful concoctions placed before him, until finally he forgot his troubles altogether and chatted and laughed with his hosts.

With *café au lait* and excellent cigars, which Ellery smoked cautiously, the Inspector diffidently, and Morgan with enjoyment, Queen came to the point.

"Morgan, I'm not going to beat around the bush. I have an idea you know why I asked you here to-night. I'm going to be perfectly honest. I want the true explanation for your silence regarding the events of Sunday night, September the twenty-third—four nights ago."

Morgan had become grave immediately the Inspector began to speak. He put the cigar on the ash-tray and regarded the old man with an expression of ineffable weariness.

"It was bound to come," he said. "I might have known that you would find out sooner or later. I suppose Mrs. Russo told you out of spite."

"She did," confessed Queen frankly. "As a gentleman I refuse to listen to tales; as a policeman it is my duty. Why have you kept this from me, Morgan?"

Morgan traced a meaningless figure on the cloth with a spoon. "Because—well, because a man is always a fool until he is made to realize the extent of his folly," he said quietly, looking up. "I hoped and prayed—it is a human failing, I suppose—that the incident would remain a secret between a dead man and myself. And to find that that prostitute was hiding in the bedroom—listening to every word I said—it rather took the wind out of my sails."

He gulped down a glass of water, rushing ahead. "The God's honest truth, Inspector, is that I thought I was

being drawn into a trap and I couldn't bring myself to furnish contributory evidence. There I found myself in the theatre, not so far away from my worst enemy found murdered. I could not explain my presence except by an apparently silly and unsubstantiated story; and I remembered in a bitter flash that I had actually quarreled with the dead man the night before. It was a tight position, Inspector—take my word for it."

Inspector Queen said nothing. Ellery was leaning far back in his chair, watching Morgan with gloomy eyes. Morgan swallowed hard and went on.

"That's why I didn't say anything. Can you blame a man for keeping quiet when his legal training warns him so decisively of the net of circumstantial evidence he is helping to manufacture?"

Queen was silent for a moment. Then—"We'll let that pass for the moment, Morgan. Why did you go to see Field Sunday night?"

"For a very good reason," answered the lawyer bitterly. "On Thursday, a week ago, Field called me up at my office and told me that he was making a last business venture that entailed his procuring fifty thousand dollars at once. Fifty thousand dollars!" Morgan laughed dryly. "After he had milked me until I was as flabby financially as an old cow. . . . And his 'business venture'—can you imagine what it was? If you knew Field as well as I did, you would find the answer on the race-tracks and the stock-market. . . . Perhaps I'm wrong. Perhaps he was hard pressed for money and was cleaning up his old 'accounts.' At any rate, he wanted the fifty thousand on a brand-new proposition—that he would actually return the original documents to me for that sum! It was the first time he had even suggested such a thing. Every time—before—he had insolently asked blackmail for silence. This time it was a buy-and-sell proposition."

"That's an interesting point, Mr. Morgan," put in Ellery, with a flicker of his eyes. "Did anything in his conversation definitely lead you to suspect that he was 'cleaning up old accounts,' as you phrase it?"

"Yes. That is why I said what I did. He gave me the impression that he was hard up, meant to take a little vacation—vacation to him would be a three-year jaunt on the Continent, nothing less—and was soliciting all his 'friends.' I never knew that he was in the blackmailing business on a large scale; but this time—!"

Ellery and the Inspector exchanged glances. Morgan forged ahead.

"I told him the truth. That I was in a bad way financially, chiefly through him, and that it would be absolutely impossible for me to raise the preposterous amount he demanded. He merely laughed—insisted on getting the money. I was most anxious to get the papers back, of course. . . ."

"Had you verified from your cancelled vouchers the fact that some were missing?" asked the Inspector.

"It wasn't necessary, Inspector," grated Morgan. "He actually exhibited the vouchers and letters for my benefit in the Webster Club two years ago—when we had the quarrel. Oh, there is no question about it. He was top man."

"Go on."

"He hung up on me with a thinly veiled threat last Thursday. I had tried desperately during the conversation to make him believe that I would in some way meet his demands, because I knew that he would have no scruples at all about publishing the papers once he realized he had sucked me dry. . . ."

"Did you ask him if you could see the documents?" asked Ellery.

"I believe I did—but he laughed at me and said I would

see the color of my checks and letters when he saw the color of my money. He was nobody's fool, that crook—he was taking no chances on my doing him in while he brought out the damning evidence. . . . You see how frank I am. I will even admit that at times the thought of violence entered my head. What man could keep from thinking such thoughts under those circumstances? But I never entertained homicidal fancies seriously, gentlemen—for a very good reason." He paused.

"It wouldn't have done you any good," said Ellery softly. "You didn't know where the documents were!"

"Exactly," returned Morgan with a tremulous smile. "I didn't know. And with those papers liable to come to light at any time—to fall into anybody's hands—what good would Field's death have done me? I would probably have exchanged a bad taskmaster for a worse. . . . On Sunday night, after trying for three terrible days to get together the money he asked for—with no result—I decided to come to a final settlement with him. I went to his apartment and found him in a dressing-gown, much surprised and not at all apprehensive at seeing me. The living-room was upset—I did not know at the time that Mrs. Russo was hiding in the next room."

He re-lit the cigar with shaking fingers.

"We quarreled—or rather I quarreled and he sneered. He would listen to no argument, to no plea. He wanted the fifty thousand or he would send the story around—and the proofs. It sort of got on my nerves after a while. . . . I left before I lost control of myself utterly. And that's all, Inspector, on my word of honor as a gentleman and as an unfortunate victim of circumstances."

He turned his head away. Inspector Queen coughed and threw his cigar into the ash-tray. He fumbled in his pocket for the brown snuff-box, took a pinch, inhaled

deeply and leaned back in his chair. Ellery suddenly poured a glass of water for Morgan, who took it and drained it.

"Thank you, Morgan," said Queen. "And since you have been so frank in your story, please be honest and tell me whether you threatened Field's life Sunday night during your quarrel. It is only fair to let you know that Mrs. Russo flatly accused you of Field's murder because of something you said in the heat of the moment."

Morgan grew pale. His brows twitched and his eyes, glazed and worried, stared pitifully at the Inspector.

"She was lying!" he cried hoarsely. Several diners nearby looked around curiously, and Inspector Queen tapped Morgan's arm. He bit his lip and lowered his voice. "I did nothing of the sort, Inspector. I was honest with you a moment ago when I said that I had thought savagely from time to time of killing Field. It was a crippled, silly, pointless thought. I—I wouldn't have the courage to kill a man. Even at the Webster Club when I lost my temper completely and shouted that threat I didn't mean it. Certainly Sunday night—please believe me rather than that unscrupulous, money-grubbing harlot, Inspector—you must!"

"I merely want you to explain what you said. Because," said the Inspector quietly, "strange as it may seem, I do believe that you made the statement she attributes to you."

"What statement?" Morgan was in a sweat of fear; his eyes started from his head.

"Publish those papers, and if it means ruin to me—I'll see to it that it's the last time you'll ever blackmail *anybody!*" repeated the Inspector. "Did you say that, Mr. Morgan?"

The lawyer stared incredulously at the Queens, then threw back his head and laughed. "Good heavens!" he gasped, at last. "Is that the 'threat' I made? Why, In-

spector, what I meant was that if he published those documents, in the event that I couldn't meet his blackguard demands, that I'd make a clean breast of it to the police and drag him down with me. That's what I meant! And she thought I was threatening his life—" He wiped his eyes hysterically.

Ellery smiled, his finger summoning the waiter. He paid the check and lit a cigarette, looking sidewise at his father, who was regarding Morgan with a mixture of abstraction and sympathy.

"Very well, Mr. Morgan." The Inspector rose, pushed back his chair. "That's all we wanted to know." He stood aside courteously to allow the dazed, still trembling lawyer to precede them toward the cloak-room.

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The sidewalk fronting the Roman Theatre was jammed when the two Queens strolled up 47th Street from Broadway. The crowd was so huge that police lines had been established. Traffic was at a complete standstill along the entire length of the narrow thoroughfare. The electric lights of the marquee blared forth the title "Gunplay" in vigorous dashes of light and in smaller lights the legend, "Starring James Peale and Eve Ellis, Supported by an All-Star Cast." Women and men wielded frenzied elbows to push through the milling mob; policemen shouted hoarsely, demanding tickets for the evening's performance before they would allow any one to pass through the lines.

The Inspector showed his badge and he and Ellery were hurled with the jostling crowd into the small lobby of the theatre. Beside the box-office, his Latin face wreathed in smiles, stood Manager Panzer, courteous, firm and authoritative, helping to speed the long line of cash customers from the box-office window to the ticket-taker. The venerable doorman, perspiring mightily, was standing

to one side, a bewildered expression on his face. The cashiers worked madly. Harry Neilson was huddled in a corner of the lobby, talking earnestly to three young men who were obviously reporters.

Panzer caught sight of the two Queens and hurried forward to greet them. At an imperious gesture from the Inspector he hesitated, then with an understanding nod turned back to the cashier's window. Ellery stood meekly in line and procured two reserved tickets from the box-office. They entered the orchestra in the midst of a pushing throng.

A startled Madge O'Connell fell back as Ellery presented two tickets plainly marked LL32 Left and LL30 Left. The Inspector smiled as she fumbled with the pasteboards and threw him a half-fearful glance. She led them across the thick carpet to the extreme left aisle, silently indicated the last two seats of the last row and fled. The two men sat down, placed their hats in the wire holders below the seats and leaned back comfortably, for all the world like two pleasure-seekers contemplating an evening's gory entertainment.

The auditorium was packed. Drove of people being ushered down the aisles were rapidly consuming the empty seats. Heads twisted expectantly in the direction of the Queens, who became unwittingly the center of a most unwelcome scrutiny.

"Heck!" grumbled the old man. "We should have come in after the curtain went up."

"You're much too sensitive to public acclaim, *mon père*," laughed Ellery. "I don't mind the limelight." He consulted his wrist-watch and their glances met significantly. It was exactly 8:25. They wriggled in their seats and settled down.

The lights were blotted out, one by one. The chatter of the audience died in a responsive sympathy. In total

darkness the curtain rose on a weirdly dim stage. A shot exploded the silence; a man's gurgling shout raised gasps in the theatre. "Gunplay" was off in its widely publicized and theatrical manner.

Despite the preoccupation of his father, Ellery, relaxed in the chair which three nights before had held the dead body of Monte Field, was able to sit still and enjoy the exceedingly mellow melodrama. The fine rich voice of James Peale, ushered onto the stage by a series of climactic incidents, rang out and thrilled him with its commanding art. Eve Ellis's utter absorption in her rôle was apparent—at the moment she was conversing in low throbbing tones with Stephen Barry, whose handsome face and pleasant voice were evoking admiring comment from a young girl seated directly to the Inspector's right. Hilda Orange was huddled in a corner, dressed flamboyantly as befitted her stage-character. The old "character-man" pottered aimlessly about the stage. Ellery leaned toward his father.

"It's a well cast production," he whispered. "Watch that Orange woman!"

The play stuttered and crackled on. With a crashing symphony of words and noise the first act came to an end. The Inspector consulted his watch as the lights snapped on. It was 9:05.

He rose and Ellery followed him lazily. Madge O'Connell, pretending not to notice them, pushed open the heavy iron doors across the aisle and the audience began to file out into the dimly lit alleyway. The two Queens sauntered out among the others.

A uniformed boy standing behind a neat stand covered with paper cups was crying his wares in a subdued, "refined" voice. It was Jess Lynch, the boy who had testified in the matter of Monte Field's request for ginger ale.

Ellery strolled behind the iron door—there was a

cramped space between the door and the brick wall. He noticed that the wall of the building flanking the other side of the alley was easily six stories high and unbroken. The Inspector bought an orange-drink from the boy. Jess Lynch recognized him with a start and Inspector Queen greeted the boy pleasantly.

People were standing in small groups, their attitudes betokening a strange interest in their surroundings. The Inspector heard a woman remark, in a fearful, fascinated voice, "They say he was standing right out here Monday night, buying an orange-drink!"

The warning-bell soon clanged inside the theatre, and those who had come outside for a breath of air hurried back into the orchestra. Before he sat down, the Inspector glanced over across the rear of the auditorium to the foot of the staircase leading to the balcony. A stalwart, uniformed young man stood alertly on the first step.

The second act exploded into being. The audience swayed and gasped in the approved fashion while the dramatic fireworks were shot off on the stage. The Queens seemed suddenly to have become absorbed in the action. Father and son leaned forward, bodies taut, eyes intent. Ellery consulted his watch at 9:30—and the two Queens settled back again while the play rumbled on.

At 9:50 exactly they rose, took their hats and coats and slipped out of the LL row into the clear space behind the orchestra. A number of people were standing—at which the Inspector smiled and blessed the power of the press beneath his breath. The white-faced usherette, Madge O'Connell, was leaning stiffly against a pillar, staring unseeingly ahead.

The Queens, spying Manager Panzer in the doorway of his office beaming delightedly at the crowded auditorium, made their way towards him. The Inspector motioned him inside and rapidly stepped into the little

anteroom, Ellery close behind. The smile faded from Panzer's face.

"I hope you've had a profitable evening?" he asked nervously.

"Profitable evening? Well—it depends upon what you mean by the word." The old man gestured briefly and led the way through the second door into Panzer's private office.

"Look here, Panzer," he said, pacing up and down in some excitement, "have you a plan of the orchestra handy which shows each seat, numbered, and all the exits?"

Panzer stared. "I think so. Just a moment." He fumbled in a filing-cabinet, rummaged among some folders and finally brought out a large map of the theatre separated into two sections—one for the orchestra and the other for the balcony.

The Inspector brushed the second away impatiently as he and Ellery bent over the orchestra-plan.* They studied it for a moment. Queen looked up at Panzer, who was shifting from one foot to another on the rug, evidently at a loss to know what would be required of him next.

"May I have this map, Panzer?" asked the Inspector shortly. "I'll return it unharmed in a few days."

"Certainly, certainly!" said Panzer. "Is there anything else I can do for you now, Inspector? . . . I want to thank you for your consideration in the matter of publicity, sir—Gordon Davis is extremely pleased at the 'house' to-night. He asked me to relay his thanks."

"Not at all—not at all," grumbled the Inspector, folding the map and putting it in his breast-pocket. "It was coming to you—what's right is right. . . . And now, Ellery—if you'll come along. . . . Good night, Panzer. Not a word about this, remember!"

* The plan illustrated in the frontispiece and drawn by Ellery Queen was designed from Manager Panzer's map.—THE EDITOR.

The two Queens slipped out of Panzer's office while he was babbling his reassurances of silence.

They crossed the rear of the orchestra once more, in the direction of the extreme left aisle. The Inspector beckoned curtly to Madge O'Connell.

"Yes," she breathed, her face chalky.

"Just open those doors wide enough to let us through, O'Connell, and forget all about it afterward. Understand?" said the Inspector grimly.

She mumbled under her breath as she pushed open one of the big iron doors opposite the LL row. With a last warning shake of the head the Inspector slipped through, Ellery following—and the door came softly back into place again.

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At 11 o'clock, as the wide exits were disgorging their first flocks of theatregoers after the final curtain, Richard and Ellery Queen re-entered the Roman Theatre through the main door.

CHAPTER XVII

IN WHICH MORE HATS GROW

"SIT down, Tim—have a cup of coffee?"

Timothy Cronin, a keen-eyed man of medium height thatched plentifully with fire-red hair, seated himself in one of the Queens' comfortable chairs and accepted the Inspector's invitation in some embarrassment.

It was Friday morning and the Inspector and Ellery, garbed romantically in colorful dressing-gowns, were in high spirits. They had retired the night before at an uncommonly early hour—for them; they had slept the sleep of the just; now Djuna had a pot of steaming coffee, of a variety which he blended himself, ready on the table; and indubitably all seemed right with the world.

Cronin had stalked into the cheery Queen quarters at an ungodly hour—disheveled, morose and unashamedly cursing. Not even the mild protests of the Inspector were able to stem the tide of profanity which streamed from his lips; and as for Ellery, he listened to the lawyer's language with an air of grave enjoyment, as an amateur harkens to a professional.

Then Cronin awoke to his environment, and blushed, and was invited to sit down, and stared at the unbending back of Djuna as that nimble man-of-affairs busied himself with the light appurtenances of the morning meal.

"I don't suppose you're in a mood to apologize for your shocking language, Tim Cronin, me lad," chided the Inspector, folding his hands Buddha-like over his stomach

"Do I have to inquire the reason for the bad temper?"

"Not much, you don't," growled Cronin, shifting his feet savagely on the rug. "You ought to be able to guess. I'm up against a blank wall in the matter of Field's papers. Blast his black soul!"

"It's blasted, Tim—it's blasted, never fear," said Queen sorrowfully. "Poor Field is probably roasting his toes over a sizzling little coal-fire in Hell just now—and chortling to himself over your profanity. Exactly what is the situation—how do things stand?"

Cronin grasped the cup Djuna had set before him and drained its scalding contents in a gulp. "Stand?" he cried, banging down the cup. "They don't stand—they're nil, nit, not! By Christopher, if I don't get my hands on some documentary evidence soon I'll go batty! Why, Inspector—Stoates and I ransacked that swell office of Field's until I don't think there's a rat in the walls who dares show his head outside a ten-foot hole—and there's nothing. Nothing! Man—it's inconceivable. I'd stake my reputation that somewhere—the Lord alone knows where—Field's papers are hidden, just begging somebody to come along and carry them away."

"You seem possessed of a phobia on the subject of hidden papers, Cronin," remarked Ellery mildly. "One would think we are living in the days of Charles the First. There's no such thing as hidden papers. You merely have to know where to look."

Cronin grinned impertinently. "That's very good of you, Mr. Queen. Suppose you suggest the place Mr. Monte Field selected to hide *his* papers."

Ellery lit a cigarette. "All right. I accept the challenge to combat. . . . You say—and I don't doubt your word in the least—that the documents you suppose to be in existence are not in Field's office. . . . By the way, what makes you so sure that Field kept papers which would in-

criminate him in this vast clique of gangsters you told us about?"

"He must have," retorted Cronin. "Queer logic, but it works. . . . My information absolutely establishes the fact that Field had correspondence and written plans connecting him with men higher up in gangdom whom we're constantly trying to 'get' and whom we haven't been able to touch so far. You'll have to take my word for it; it's too complicated a story to go into here. But you mark my words, Mr. Queen—Field had papers that he couldn't afford to destroy. Those are the papers I'm looking for."

"Granted," said Ellery in a rhetorical tone. "I merely wished to make certain of the facts. Let me repeat, then, these papers are not in his office. We must therefore look for them farther afield. For example, they might be secreted in a safety-deposit vault."

"But, El," objected the Inspector, who had listened to the interplay between Cronin and Ellery in amusement, "didn't I tell you this morning that Thomas had run that lead to earth? Field did not have a box in a safety-deposit vault. That is established. He had no general delivery or private post-office box either—under his real name or any other name.

"Thomas has also investigated Field's club affiliations and discovered that the lawyer had no residence, permanent or temporary, besides the flat on 75th Street. Furthermore, in all Thomas's scouting around, he found not the slightest indication of a possible hiding-place. He thought that Field might have left the papers in a parcel or bag in the keeping of a shopkeeper, or something of the sort. But there wasn't a trace. . . . Velie's a good man in these matters, Ellery. You can bet your bottom dollar that hypothesis of yours is false."

"I was making a point for Cronin's benefit," retorted

Ellery. He spread his fingers on the table elaborately and winked. "You see, we must narrow the field of search to the point where we can definitely say: 'It must be here.' The office, the safety-deposit vault, the post-office boxes have been ruled out. Yet we know that Field could not afford to keep these documents in a place difficult of access. I cannot vouch for the papers *you're* seeking, Cronin; but it's different with the papers *we're* seeking. No; Field had them somewhere near at hand. . . . And, to go a step further, it's reasonable to assume that he would have kept all his important secret papers in the same hiding-place."

Cronin scratched his head and nodded.

"We shall now apply the elementary precepts, gentlemen." Ellery paused as if to emphasize his next statement. "Since we have narrowed our area of inquiry to the exclusion of all possible hiding-places save one—the papers must be in that one hiding-place. . . . Nothing to that."

"Now that I pause to consider," interpolated the Inspector, his good humor suddenly dissipated into gloom, "perhaps we weren't as careful in that place as we might have been."

"I'm as certain we're on the right track," said Ellery firmly, "as that to-day is Friday and there will be fish suppers in thirty million homes to-night."

Cronin was looking puzzled. "I don't quite get it, Mr. Queen. What do you mean when you say there's only one possible hiding-place left?"

"Field's apartment, Cronin," replied Ellery imperturbably. "The papers are there."

"But I was discussing the case with the D. A. only yesterday," objected Cronin, "and he said you'd already ransacked Field's apartment and found nothing."

"True—true enough," said Ellery. "We searched Field's

apartment and found nothing. The trouble was, Cronin, that we didn't look in the right place."

"Well, by ginger, if you know now, let's get a move on!" cried Cronin, springing from his chair.

The Inspector tapped the red-haired man's knee gently and pointed to the seat. "Sit down, Tim," he advised. "Ellery is merely indulging in his favorite game of ratiocination. He doesn't know where the papers are any more than you do. He's guessing. . . . In detective literature," he added with a sad smile, "they call it the 'art of deduction.'"

"I should say," murmured Ellery, emitting a cloud of smoke, "that I am being challenged once more. Nevertheless, although I haven't been back to Field's rooms I intend, with Inspector Queen's kind permission, to return there and find the slippery documents."

"In the matter of these papers—" began the old man, when he was interrupted by the doorbell ringing. Djuna admitted Sergeant Velie, who was accompanied by a small, furtive young man so ill at ease as to be trembling. The Inspector sprang to his feet and intercepted them before they could enter the living-room. Cronin stared as Queen said, "This the fellow, Thomas?" and the big detective answered with grim levity, "Large as life, Inspector."

"Think you could burgle an apartment without being caught, do you?" inquired the Inspector genially, taking the newcomer by the arm. "You're just the man I want."

The furtive young man seemed overcome by a species of terrified palsy. "Say, Inspector, yer not takin' me fer a ride, are ya?" he stammered.

The Inspector smiled reassuringly and led him out into the foyer. They held a whispered and one-sided conversation, with the stranger grunting assents at every second word uttered by the old man. Cronin and Ellery in the living-room caught the flash of a small sheet of paper as

it passed from the Inspector's hand into the clutching paw of the young man.

Queen returned, stepping spryly. "All right, Thomas. You take care of the other arrangements and see that our friend here gets into no trouble. . . . Now, gentlemen—"

Velie made his adieu monosyllabically and led the frightened stranger from the apartment.

The Inspector sat down. "Before we go over to Field's rooms, boys," he said thoughtfully, "I want to make certain things plain. In the first place, from what Benjamin Morgan has told us, Field's business was law but his great source of income—blackmail. Did you know that, Tim? Monte Field sucked dozens of prominent men dry, in all likelihood to the tune of hundreds of thousands of dollars. In fact, Tim, we're convinced that the motive behind Field's murder was connected with this phase of his undercover activities. There is no doubt but that he was killed by somebody who was being taken in for huge sums of hush-money and could stand the gaff no longer.

"You know as well as I, Tim, that blackmail depends largely for its ugly life on the possession of incriminating documents by the blackmailer. That's why we're so sure that there are hidden papers about somewhere—and Ellery here maintains that they're in Field's rooms. Well, we'll see. If eventually we find those papers, the documents you've been hunting so long will probably come to light also, as Ellery pointed out a moment ago."

He paused reflectively. "I can't tell you, Tim, how badly I want to get my hands on those confounded documents of Field's. They mean a good deal to me. They'd clear up a lot of questions about which we're still in the dark. . . ."

"Well, then, let's get going!" cried Cronin, leaping from his chair. "Do you realize, Inspector, that I've worked for years on Field's tail for this one purpose? It will be the

happiest day of my life. . . . Inspector—come on!”

Neither Ellery nor his father, however, seemed to be in haste. They retired to the bedroom to dress while Cronin fretted in the living-room. If Cronin had not been so preoccupied with his own thoughts he would have noticed that the light spirits which had suffused the Queens when he arrived were now scattered into black gloom. The Inspector particularly seemed out of sorts, irritable and for once slow to push the investigation into an inevitable channel.

Eventually the Queens appeared fully dressed. The three men descended to the street. As they climbed into a taxicab Ellery sighed.

“Afraid you’re going to be shown up, son?” muttered the old man, his nose buried in the folds of his topcoat.

“I’m not thinking of that,” returned Ellery. “It’s something else. . . . The papers will be found, never fear.”

“I hope to Christmas you’re right!” breathed Cronin fervently, and it was the last word spoken until the taxicab ground to a stop before the lofty apartment-house on 75th Street.

The three men took the elevator to the fourth floor and stepped out into the quiet corridor. The Inspector peered about quickly, then punched the doorbell of the Field apartment. There was no answer, although they could hear the vague rustling of someone behind the door. Suddenly it swished open to reveal a red-faced policeman whose hand hovered uneasily in the region of his hip-pocket.

“Don’t be scared, man—we won’t bite you!” growled the Inspector, who was completely out of temper for no reason that Cronin, nervous and springy as a racing-colt, could fathom.

The uniformed man saluted. “Didn’t know but it

might be someone snoopin' around, Inspector," he said feebly.

The three men walked into the foyer, the slim, white hand of the old man pushing the door violently shut.

"Anything been happening around here?" snapped Queen, striding to the entrance to the living-room and looking inside.

"Not a thing, sir," said the policeman. "I'm on four-hour shifts with Cassidy as relief and once in a while Detective Ritter drops in to see if everything is all right."

"Oh, he does, does he?" The old man turned back. "Anybody try to get into the place?"

"Not while I was here, Inspector—nor Cassidy neither," responded the policeman nervously. "And we've been alternating ever since Tuesday morning. There hasn't been a soul near these rooms except Ritter."

"Park out here in the foyer for the next couple of hours, officer," commanded the Inspector. "Get yourself a chair and take a snooze if you want to—but if anybody should start monkeying with the door tip us off pronto."

The policeman dragged a chair from the living-room into the foyer, sat down with his back against the front door, folded his arms and unashamedly closed his eyes.

The three men took in the scene with gloomy eyes. The foyer was small but crowded with oddments of furniture and decoration. A bookcase filled with unused-appearing volumes; a small table on which perched a "modernistic" lamp and some carved ivory ash-trays; two Empire chairs; a peculiar piece of furniture which seemed half sideboard and half secretary; and a number of cushions and rugs were scattered about. The Inspector stood regarding this melange wryly.

"Here, son—I guess the best way for us to tackle the search is for the three of us to go through everything

piece by piece, one checking up on the other. I'm not very hopeful about it, I'll tell you that."

"The gentleman of the Wailing Wall," groaned Ellery. "Grief is writ fine and large on his noble visage. You and I, Cronin—we're not such pessimists, are we?"

Cronin growled, "I'd say—less talk and more action, with all the respect in the world for these little family ructions."

Ellery stared at him with admiration. "You're almost insectivorous in your determination, man. More like an army-ant than a human being. And poor Field's lying in the morgue, too. . . . *Allons, enfants!*"

They set to work under the nodding head of the policeman. They worked silently for the most part. Ellery's face reflected a calm expectancy; the Inspector's a doleful irritation; Cronin's a savage indomitability. Book after book was extracted from the case and carefully inspected—leaves shaken out—covers examined minutely—back-boards pinched and pierced. There were over two hundred books and the thorough search took a long time. Ellery, after a period of activity, seemed inclined to allow his father and Cronin to do the heavier work of inspection while he devoted his attention more and more to the titles of the volumes. At one point he uttered a delighted exclamation and held up to the light a thin, cheaply bound book. Cronin leaped forward immediately, his eyes blazing. The Inspector looked up with a flicker of interest. But Ellery had merely discovered another volume on handwriting analysis.

The old man stared at his son in silent curiosity, his lips puckered thoughtfully. Cronin turned back to the book-case with a groan. Ellery, however, riffling the pages rapidly, cried out again. The two men craned over his shoulder. On the margins of several pages were some penciled notations. The words spelled names: "Henry

Jones," "John Smith," "George Brown." They were repeated many times on the margins of the page, as if the writer were practicing different styles of penmanship.

"Didn't Field have the most adolescent yen for scribbling?" asked Ellery, staring fascinatedly at the penciled names.

"As usual you have something up your sleeve, my son," remarked the Inspector wearily. "I see what you mean, but I don't see that it helps us any. Except for— By jinks, that's an idea!"

He bent forward and attacked the search once more, his body vibrant with fresh interest. Ellery, smiling, joined him. Cronin stared uncomprehendingly at both.

"Suppose you let me in on this thing, folks," he said in an aggrieved voice.

The Inspector straightened up. "Ellery's hit on something that, if it's true, is a bit of luck for us and reveals still another sidelight on Field's character. The black-hearted rascal! See here, Tim—if a man's an inveterate blackmailer and you find continual evidence that he has been practicing handwriting from textbooks on the subject, what conclusion would you draw?"

"You mean that he's a forger, too?" frowned Cronin. "I never suspected that in spite of all these years of hounding him."

"Not merely a forger, Cronin," laughed Ellery. "I don't think you will find Monte Field has penned somebody else's name to a check, or anything of that sort. He was too wily a bird to make such a grievous error. What he probably did do was secure original and incriminating documents referring to a certain individual, make copies of them and sell the *copies* back to the owner, retaining the originals for further use!"

"And in that case, Tim," added the Inspector portentously, "if we find this gold mine of papers somewhere

about—which I greatly doubt—we'll also find, as like as not, the original or originals of the papers for which Monte Field was murdered!"

The red-haired Assistant District Attorney pulled a long face at his two companions. "Seems like a lot of 'ifs,'" he said finally, shaking his head.

They resumed the search in growing silence.

Nothing was concealed in the foyer. After an hour of steady, back-breaking work they were forced reluctantly to that conclusion. Not a square inch was left unexamined. The interior of the lamp and of the bookcase; the slender, thin-topped table; the secretary, inside and outside; the cushions; even the walls were tapped carefully by the Inspector, who by now was aroused to a high pitch of excitement, suppressed but remarkable in his tight lips and color-touched cheeks.

They attacked the living-room. Their first port-of-call was the big clothes-closet inside the room directly off the foyer. Again the Inspector and Ellery went through the topcoats, overcoats and capes hanging on the rack. Nothing. On the shelf above were the four hats they had examined on Tuesday morning: the old Panama, the derby and the two fedoras. Still nothing. Cronin bumped down on his knees to peer savagely into the darker recesses of the closet, tapping the wall, searching for signs of tampered woodwork. And still nothing. With the aid of a chair the Inspector poked into the corners of the area above the shelf. He climbed down, shaking his head.

"Forget the closet, boys," he muttered. They descended upon the room proper.

The large carved desk which Hagstrom and Piggott had rifled three days before invited their scrutiny. Inside was the pile of papers, canceled bills and letters they had offered for the old man's inspection. Old Queen actually peered through these torn and ragged sheets as if they might

conceal messages in invisible ink. He shrugged his shoulders and threw them down.

"Darned if I'm not growing romantic in my old age," he growled. "The influence of a fiction-writing rascal of a son."

He picked up the miscellaneous articles he himself had found on Tuesday in the pockets of the closet coats. Ellery was scowling now; Cronin was beginning to wear a forlorn, philosophical expression; the old man shuffled abstractedly among the keys, old letters, wallets and then turned away.

"Nothing in the desk," he announced wearily. "I doubt if that clever limb of Satan would have selected anything as obvious as a desk for a hiding-place."

"He would if he'd read his Edgar Allan Poe," murmured Ellery. "Let's get on. Sure there is no secret drawer here?" he asked Cronin. The red head was shaken sadly but emphatically.

They probed and poked about in the furniture, under the carpets and lamps, in book-ends, curtain-rods. With each successive failure the apparent hopelessness of the search was reflected in their faces. When they had finished with the living-room it looked as if it had innocently fallen into the path of a hurricane—a bare and comfortless satisfaction.

"Nothing left but the bedroom, kitchenette and lavatory," said the Inspector to Cronin; and the three men went into the room which Mrs. Angela Russo had occupied Monday night.

Field's bedroom was distinctly feminine in its accoutrements—a characteristic which Ellery ascribed to the influence of the charming Greenwich Villager. Again they scoured the premises, not an inch of space eluding their vigilant eyes and questing hands; and again there seemed nothing to do but admit failure. They took apart the

bedding and examined the spring of the bed; they put it together again and attacked the clothes-closet. Every suit was mauled and crushed by their insistent fingers—bath-robes, dressing-gowns, shoes, cravats. Cronin half-heartedly repeated his examination of the walls and moldings. They lifted rugs and picked up chairs; shook out the pages of the telephone book in the bedside telephone-table. The Inspector even lifted the metal disk which fitted around the steam-pipe at the floor, because it was loose and seemed to present possibilities.

From the bedroom they went into the kitchenette. It was so crowded with kitchen furnishings that they could barely move about. A large cabinet was rifled; Cronin's exasperated fingers dipped angrily into the flour- and sugar-bins. The stove, the dish-closet, the pan-closet—even the single marble washtub in a corner—was methodically gone over. On the floor to one side stood the half-empty case of liquor bottles. Cronin cast longing glances in this direction, only to look guiltily away as the Inspector glared at him.

"And now—the bathroom," murmured Ellery. In an ominous silence they trooped into the tiled lavatory. Three minutes later they came out, still silently, and went into the living-room where they disposed themselves in chairs. The Inspector drew out his snuff-box and took a vicious pinch; Cronin and Ellery lit cigarettes.

"I should say, my son," said the Inspector in sepulchral tones after a painful interval broken only by the snores of the policeman in the foyer, "I should say that the deductive method which has brought fame and fortune to Mr. Sherlock Holmes and his legions has gone awry. Mind you, I'm not scolding. . . ." But he slouched into the fastnesses of the chair.

Ellery stroked his smooth jaw with nervous fingers. "I seem to have made something of an ass of myself," he

confessed. "And yet those papers are here somewhere. Isn't that a silly notion to have? But logic bears me out. When ten is the whole and two plus three plus four are discarded, only one is left. . . . Pardon me for being old-fashioned. I insist the papers are here."

Cronin grunted and expelled a huge mouthful of smoke.

"Your objection sustained," murmured Ellery, leaning back. "Let's go over the ground again. No, no!" he explained hastily, as Cronin's face lengthened in dismay—"I mean orally. . . . Mr. Field's apartment consists of a foyer, a living-room, a kitchenette, a bedroom and a lavatory. We have fruitlessly examined a foyer, a living-room, a kitchenette, a bedroom and a lavatory. Euclid would regretfully force a conclusion here. . . ." He mused. "How have we examined these rooms?" he asked suddenly. "We have gone over the obvious things, pulled the obvious things to pieces. Furniture, lamps, carpets—I repeat, the obvious things. And we have tapped floors, walls and molding. It would seem that nothing has escaped the search. . . ."

He stopped, his eyes brightening. The Inspector threw off his look of fatigue at once. From experience he was aware that Ellery rarely grew excited over inconsequential things.

"And yet," said Ellery slowly, gazing in fascination at his father's face, "by the Golden Roofs of Seneca, we've overlooked something—actually overlooked something!"

"What!" growled Cronin. "You're kidding."

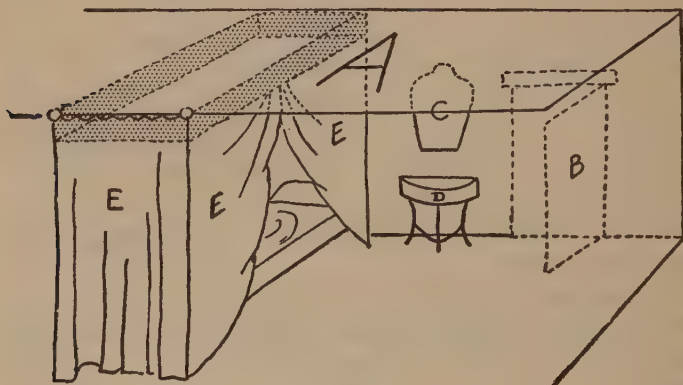
"Oh, but I'm not," chuckled Ellery, lounging to his feet. "We have examined floors and we have examined walls, but have we examined—ceilings?"

He shot the word forth theatrically while the two men stared at him in amazement.

"Here, what are you driving at, Ellery?" asked his father, frowning.

Ellery briskly crushed his cigarette in an ash-tray. "Just this," he said. "Pure reasoning has it that when you have exhausted every possibility but one in a given equation that one, no matter how improbable, no matter how ridiculous it may seem in the postulation—*must be the correct one*. . . . A theorem analogous to the one by which I concluded that the papers were in this apartment."

"But, Mr. Queen, for the love of Pete—ceilings!" exploded Cronin, while the Inspector looked guiltily at the living-room ceiling. Ellery caught the look and laughed, shaking his head.



A—Ceiling
B—Door to Living Room
C—Mirror
D—Dressing Table

E—Damask curtains around bed, from ceiling to floor, concealing shaded portion which represents panel containing hats.

"I'm not suggesting that we call in a plasterer to maul these lovely middle-class ceilings," he said. "Because I have the answer already. What is it in these rooms somewhere that is on the ceiling?"

"The chandeliers," muttered Cronin doubtfully, gazing upward at the heavily bronzed fixture above their heads.

"By jinks—the canopy over the bed!" shouted the In-

spector. He jumped to his feet and ran into the bedroom. Cronin pounded hard after him, Ellery sauntering interestedly behind.

They stopped at the foot of the bed and stared up at the canopy. Unlike the conventional canopies of American style, this florid ornament was not merely a large square of cloth erected on four posts, an integral part of the bed only. The bed was so constructed that the four posts, beginning at the four corners, stretched from floor to ceiling. The heavy maroon-colored damask of the canopy also reached from floor to ceiling, connected at the top by a ringed rod from which the folds of the damask hung gracefully.

"Well, if it's anywhere," grunted the Inspector, dragging one of the damask-covered bedroom chairs to the bed, "it's up there. Here, boys, lend a hand."

He stood on the chair with a fine disregard for the havoc his shoes were wreaking on the silken material. Finding upon stretching his arms above his head that he was still many feet short of touching the ceiling, he stepped down.

"Doesn't look as if you could make it either, Ellery," he muttered. "And Field was no taller than you. There must be a ladder handy somewhere by which Field himself got up here!"

Cronin dashed into the kitchenette at Ellery's nod in that direction. He was back in a moment with a six-foot stepladder. The Inspector, mounting to the highest rung, found that his fingers were still short of touching the rod. Ellery solved the difficulty by ordering his father down and climbing to the top himself. Standing on the ladder he was in a position to explore the top of the canopy.

He grasped the damask firmly and pulled. The entire fabric gave way and fell to the sides, revealing a wooden panel about twelve inches deep—a framework which the hangings had concealed. Ellery's fingers swept swiftly

over the wooden relief-work of this panel. Cronin and the Inspector were staring with varying expressions up at him. Finding nothing that at the moment presented a possibility of entrance, Ellery leaned forward and explored the damask directly beneath the floor of the panel.

"Rip it down!" growled the Inspector.

Ellery jerked violently at the material and the entire canopy of damask fell to the bed. The bare unornamented floor of the panel was revealed.

"It's hollow," announced Ellery, rapping his knuckles on the under-side paneling.

"That doesn't help much," said Cronin. "It wouldn't be a solid chunk, anyway. Why don't you try the other side of the bed, Mr. Queen?"

But Ellery, who had drawn back and was again examining the side of the panel, exclaimed triumphantly. He had been seeking a complicated, Machiavellian "secret door"—he found now that the secret door was nothing more subtle than a sliding-panel. It was cleverly concealed—the juncture of sliding and stationary panels was covered by a row of wooden rosettes and clumsy decorations—but it was nothing that a student of mystery lore would have hailed as a triumph of concealment.

"It begins to appear as if I were being vindicated," Ellery chuckled as he peered into the black recesses of the hole he had uncovered. He thrust a long arm into the aperture. The Inspector and Cronin were staring at him with bated breath.

"By all the pagan gods," shouted Ellery suddenly, his lean body quivering with excitement. "Do you remember what I told you, dad? Where would those papers be except in—hats!"

His sleeve coated with dust, he withdrew his arm and the two men below saw in his hand a musty silk tophat!

Cronin executed an intricate jig as Ellery dropped the

hat on the bed and dipped his arm once more into the yawning hole. In a moment he had brought out another hat—and another—and still another! There they lay on the bed—two silk hats and two derbies.

"Take this flashlight, son," commanded the Inspector. "See if there's anything else up there."

Ellery took the proffered electric torch and flashed its beam into the aperture. After a moment he clambered down, shaking his head.

"That's all," he announced, dusting his sleeve, "but I should think it would be enough."

The Inspector picked up the four hats and carried them into the living-room, where he deposited them on a sofa. The three men sat down gravely and regarded each other.

"I'm sort of itching to see what's what," said Cronin finally, in a hushed voice.

"I'm rather afraid to look," retorted the Inspector.

"*Mene mene tekel upharsin*," laughed Ellery. "In this case it might be interpreted as 'the handwriting on the panel.' Examine on, MacDuff!"

The Inspector picked up one of the silk hats. It bore on the rich satiny lining the chaste trademark of Browne Bros. Ripping out the lining and finding nothing beneath, he tried to tear out the leather sweat-band. It resisted his mightiest efforts. He borrowed Cronin's pocket-knife and with difficulty slashed away the band. Then he looked up.

"This hat, Romans and countrymen," he said pleasantly, "contains nothing but the familiar ingredients of hat-wear. Would you care to examine it?"

Cronin uttered a savage cry and snatched it from the Inspector's hand. He literally tore the hat to pieces in his rage.

"Heck!" he said disgustedly, throwing the remnants on the floor. "Explain that to my undeveloped brain, will you, Inspector?"

Queen smiled, taking up the second silk hat and regarding it curiously.

"You're at a disadvantage, Tim," he said. "We know why one of these hats is a blank. Don't we, Ellery?"

"Michaels," murmured Ellery.

"Exactly—Michaels," returned the Inspector.

"Charley Michaels!" exclaimed Cronin. "Field's strong-arm guy, by all that's holy! Where does he come into this?"

"Can't tell yet. Know anything about him?"

"Nothing except that he hung onto Field's coat-tails pretty closely. He's an ex-jailbird, did you know that?"

"Yes," replied the Inspector dreamily. "We'll have a talk about that phase of Mr. Michaels some other time. . . . But let me explain that hat: Michaels on the evening of the murder laid out, according to his statement, Field's evening clothes, including a silk hat. Michaels swore that as far as he knew Field possessed only *one* topper. Now if we suppose that Field used hats for concealing papers, and was going to the Roman Theatre that night wearing a 'loaded' one he must necessarily have substituted the loaded hat for the empty one which Michaels prepared. Since he was so careful to keep only one silk hat in the closet, he realized that Michaels, should he find a topper, would be suspicious. So, in switching hats, he had to conceal the empty one. What more natural than that he should put it in the place from which he had taken the loaded hat—the panel above the bed?"

"Well, I'll be switched!" exclaimed Cronin.

"Finally," resumed the Inspector, "we can take it as gospel that Field, who was devilishly careful in the matter of his headgear, intended to restore the theatre hat to its hideaway when he got home from the Roman. Then he would have taken out this one which you've just torn

up and put it back in the clothes-closet. . . . But let's get on."

He pulled down the leather inner-band of the second silk hat, which also bore the imprint of Browne Bros. "Look at this, will you!" he exclaimed. The two men bent over and saw on the inner surface of the band, lettered with painful clarity in a purplish ink, the words BENJAMIN MORGAN.

"I've got to pledge you to secrecy, Tim," said the Inspector immediately, turning to the red-haired man. "Never let on that you were a witness to the finding of papers in any way implicating Benjamin Morgan in this affair."

"What do you think I am, Inspector?" growled Cronin. "I'm as dumb as an oyster, believe me!"

"All right, then." Queen felt the lining of the hat. There was a distinct crackle.

"Now," remarked Ellery calmly, "we know for the first time definitely why the murderer *had* to take away the hat Field wore Monday night. In all likelihood the murderer's name was lettered in the same way—that's indelible ink, you know—and the murderer couldn't leave a hat with his own name in it at the scene of the crime."

"By gosh, if you only had that hat, now," cried Cronin, "you'd know who the murderer is!"

"I'm afraid, Tim," replied the Inspector dryly, "that hat is gone forever."

He indicated a row of careful stitches at the base of the inner band, where the lining was attached to the fabric. He ripped these stitches swiftly and inserted his fingers between the lining and the crown. Silently he drew out a sheaf of papers held together by a thin rubber band.

"If I were as nasty as some people think I am," mused

Ellery, leaning back, "I might with perfect justice say, 'I told you so.'"

"We know when we're licked, my son—don't rub it in," chortled the Inspector. He snapped off the rubber band, glanced hastily through the papers and with a satisfied grin deposited them in his breast pocket.

"Morgan's, all right," he said briefly, and attacked one of the derbies.

The inner side of the band was marked cryptically with an X. The Inspector found a row of stitches exactly as in the silk hat. The papers he drew out—a thicker bundle than Morgan's—he examined cursorily. Then he handed them to Cronin, whose fingers were trembling.

"A stroke of luck, Tim," he said slowly. "The man you were angling for is dead, but there are a lot of big names in this. I think you'll find yourself a hero one of these days."

Cronin grasped the bundle and feverishly unfolded the papers, one by one. "They're here—they're here!" he shouted. He jumped to his feet, stuffing the sheaf into his pocket.

"I've got to beat it, Inspector," he said rapidly. "There's a load of work to do at last—and besides, what you find in that fourth hat is none of my business. I can't thank you and Mr. Queen enough! So long!"

He dashed from the room, and a moment later the snores of the policeman in the foyer came to an abrupt end. The outer door banged shut.

Ellery and the Inspector looked at each other.

"I don't know what good this stuff is going to do us," grumbled the old man, fumbling with the inner band of the last hat, a derby. "We've found things and deduced things and run rings around our imaginations—well. . . ." He sighed as he held the band up to the light.

It was marked: MISC.

CHAPTER XVIII

STALEMATE

AT Friday noon, while Inspector Queen, Ellery and Timothy Cronin were deep in their search of Monte Field's rooms, Sergeant Velie, sombre and unmoved as usual, walked slowly up 87th Street from Broadway, mounted the brownstone steps of the house in which the Queens lived and rang the bell. Djuna's cheery voice bade him ascend, which the good Sergeant did with gravity.

"Inspector's not home!" announced Djuna pertly, his slim body completely hidden behind an enormous housewife's apron. Odorous traces of an onion-covered steak pervaded the air.

"Get on with you, you imp!" growled Velie. He took from his inner breast pocket a bulky envelope, sealed, and handed it to Djuna. "Give this to the Inspector when he comes home. Forget, and I'll dip you into the East River."

"You and who else?" breathed Djuna, with a remarkable twitching of his lips. Then he added decorously, "Yes, sir."

"All right, then." Velie deliberately turned about and descended to the street, where his broad back was visible in formidable proportions to the grinning Djuna from the fourth-story window.

When, at a little before six, the two Queens trudged wearily into their rooms, the alert eyes of the Inspector pounced upon the official envelope where it lay on his plate.

He tore off a corner of the envelope and pulled out a

number of typewritten sheets on the stationery of the Detective Bureau.

"Well, well!" he muttered to Ellery, who was lazily pulling off his topcoat. "The clans are gathering. . . ."

Sinking into an armchair, his hat forgotten on his head, his coat still buttoned, he set about reading the reports aloud.

The first slip read:

REPORT OF RELEASE

28 September 192—

John Cazzanelli, alias Parson Johnny, alias John the Wop, alias Peter Dominick, released from custody today on parole.

Under-cover investigation of J. C.'s complicity in the robbery of the Bonomo Silk Mills (June 2, 192—) not successful. We are searching for "Dinky" Morehouse, police informer, who has disappeared from usual haunts, for further information.

Release effected under advice of District Attorney Sampson. J. C. under surveillance and is available at any time.

T. V.

The second report which the Inspector picked up, laying aside the advices concerning Parson Johnny with a frown, read as follows:

REPORT ON WILLIAM PUSAK

September 28, 192—

Investigation of the history of William Pusak reveals the following:

32 years old; born in Brooklyn, N. Y., of naturalized parents; unmarried; regular habits; socially inclined; has "dates" three or four nights a week; religious. Is bookkeeper at Stein & Rauch, clothing merchants, 1076 Broadway. Does not gamble or drink. No evil companions. Only vice seems fondness for girls.

Activities since Monday night normal. No letters sent, no money withdrawn from bank, hours fairly regular. No suspicious movements of any kind.

Girl, Esther Jablow, seems Pusak's "steadiest." Has seen E. J. twice since Monday—Tuesday at lunch, Wednesday evening. Went to movies and Chinese restaurant Wednesday evening.

Operative No. 4.
(OK'd: T. V.)

The Inspector grunted as he threw the sheet aside. The third report was headed:

REPORT ON MADGE O'CONNELL

To Friday, Sept. 28, '2—

O'Connell, lives at 1436—10th Avenue. Tenement, 4th floor. No father. Idle since Monday night, due to shutting down of Roman Theatre. Left theatre Monday night at general release of public. Went home, but stopped in drugstore corner 8th Avenue and 48th Street to telephone. Unable to trace call. Overheard reference to Parson Johnny in 'phone conversation. Seemed excited.

Tuesday did not leave house until 1 o'clock. No attempt get in touch with Parson Johnny at Tombs. Went around theatre employment agencies looking for usherette position after finding out Roman Theatre was closed indefinitely.

Nothing new Wednesday all day or Thursday. Returned to work at Roman Thursday night after call from manager. No attempt see or communicate with Parson Johnny. No incoming calls, no visitors, no mail. Seemed suspicious—think she is "wise" to tailing.

Operative No. 11
OK'd: T. V.

"Hmph!" muttered the Inspector as he picked up the next sheet of paper. "Let's see what this one says. . . ."

REPORT ON FRANCES IVES-POPE

September 28, 192—

F. I.-P. left Roman Theatre Monday night directly after release from Manager's Office by Inspector Queen. Examined with other departing members of audience at main door. Left in company of Eve Ellis, Stephen Barry, Hilda Orange, of the cast.

Took taxi to Ives-Pope house on Riverside Drive. Taken out in half-unconscious condition. Three actors left house soon after.

Tuesday she did not leave house. Learned from a gardener she was laid up in bed all day. Learned she received many calls during day.

Did not appear formally until Wednesday morning at interview in house with Inspector Queen. After interview, left house in company of Stephen Barry, Eve Ellis, James Peale, her brother Stanford. Ives-Pope limousine drove party out into Westchester. Outing revived F. Evening stayed at home with Stephen Barry. Bridge-party on.

Thursday went shopping on Fifth Avenue. Met Stephen Barry for luncheon. He took her to Central Park; spent afternoon in open. S.B. escorted her home before five. S.B. stayed to dinner, leaving after dinner for work at Roman Theatre on call from stage manager. F. I.-P. spent evening at home with family.

No report Friday morning. No suspicious actions all week. At no time accosted by strange persons. No communication from or to Benjamin Morgan.

Operative No. 39

OK'd: T. V.

"And that's that," murmured the Inspector. The next report he selected was extremely short.

REPORT ON OSCAR LEWIN

September 28, 192-

Lewin spent all day Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday morning at office of Monte Field working with Messrs. Stoates and Cronin. Three men lunched together on each day.

Lewin married, lives in Bronx, 211 E. 156th Street. Spent every evening at home. No suspicious mail, no suspicious calls. No evil habits. Leads sober, modest life. Has good reputation.

Operative No. 16

NOTE: Full details of Oscar Lewin's history, habits, etc., available on request through Timothy Cronin, Assistant District Attorney.

T. V.

The Inspector sighed as he deposited the five sheets of paper on his plate, rose, doffed his hat and coat, flung them into Djuna's waiting arms and sat down again. Then he picked up the last report from the contents of the envelope—a larger sheet to which was pinned a small slip marked: MEMORANDUM TO R.Q.

This slip read:

Dr. Prouty left the attached report with me this morning for transmission to you. He is sorry he could not report in person, but the Burbridge poison-case is taking all his time.

It was signed with Velie's familiar scrawling initials.

The attached sheet was a hastily typewritten message on the letterhead of the Chief Medical Examiner's office.

Dear Q [the message ran]: Here's the dope on the tetra ethyl lead. Jones and I have been superintending an exhaustive probe of all possible sources of dissemination. No success, and I think you can resign yourself to your fate in this respect. You'll never trace the poison that killed Monte Field. This is the opinion not merely of your humble servant but of the Chief and of Jones. We all agree that the most logical explanation is the gasoline theory. Try to trace *that*, Sherlocko!

A postscript in Dr. Prouty's handwriting ran:

"Of course, if anything turns up, I'll let you know immediately. Keep sober."

"Fat lot of good *that* is!" mumbled the Inspector, as Ellery without a word attacked the aromatic and tempting meal that the priceless Djuna had prepared. The Inspector dug viciously into the fruit salad. He looked far from happy. He grumbled beneath his breath, cast baleful glances at the sheaf of reports by his plate, peered up at Ellery's tired face and heartily munching jaws and finally threw down his spoon altogether.

"Of all the useless, exasperating, empty bunch of reports I ever saw—!" he growled.

Ellery smiled. "You remember Periander, of course. . . . Eh? You might be polite, sir. . . . Periander of Corinth, who said in a moment of sobriety, 'To industry nothing is impossible!'"

.

With the fire roaring, Djuna curled up on the floor in a corner, his favorite attitude. Ellery smoked a cigarette and stared comfortably into the flames while old Queen crammed his nose vengefully with the contents of his snuff-box. The two Queens settled down to a serious discussion. To be more exact—Inspector Queen settled down and lent the tone of seriousness to the conversation, since Ellery seemed in a sublimely dreamy mood far removed from the sordid details of crime and punishment.

The old man brought his hand down on the arm of his chair with a sharp slap. "Ellery, did you ever in your born days see a case so positively nerve-racking?"

"On the contrary," commented Ellery, staring with half-closed eyes into the fire. "You are developing a natural case of nerves. You allow little things like apprehending a murderer to upset you unduly. Pardon the hedonistic philosophy. . . . If you will recall, in my story entitled 'The Affair of the Black Window,' my good sleuths had no difficulty at all in laying their hands on the criminal. And why? Because they kept their heads. Conclusion: Always keep your head. . . . I'm thinking of to-morrow. Glorious vacation!"

"For an educated man, my son," growled the Inspector petulantly, "you show a surprising lack of coherence. You say things that mean nothing and mean things when you say nothing. No—I'm all mixed up—"

Ellery burst into laughter. "The Maine woods—the

russet—the good Chauvin's cabin by the lake—a rod—air—Oh Lord, won't to-morrow ever come?"

Inspector Queen regarded his son with a pitiful eagerness. "I—I sort of wish. . . . Well, never mind." He sighed. "All I do say, El, is that if my little burglar fails—it's all up with us."

"To the blessed Gehenna with burglars!" cried Ellery. "What has Pan to do with human tribulation? My next book is as good as written, dad."

"Stealing another idea from real life, you rascal," muttered the old man. "If you're borrowing the Field case for your plot, I'd be extremely interested to read your last few chapters!"

"Poor dad!" chuckled Ellery. "Don't take life so seriously. If you fail, you fail. Monte Field wasn't worth a hill of legumes, anyway."

"That's not the point," said the old man. "I hate to admit defeat. . . . What a queer mess of motives and schemes this case is, Ellery. This is the first time in my entire experience that I have had such a hard nut to crack. It's enough to give a man apoplexy! I know WHO committed the murder—I know WHY the murder was committed—I even know HOW the murder was committed! And where am I? . . ." He paused and savagely took a pinch of snuff. "A million miles from nowhere, *that's* where!" he growled, and subsided.

"Certainly a most unusual situation," murmured Ellery. "Yet—more difficult things have been accomplished. . . . Heigh-ho! I can't wait to bathe myself in that Arcadian stream!"

"And get pneumonia, probably," said the Inspector anxiously. "You promise me now, young man, that you don't do any back-to-Nature stunts out there. I don't want a funeral on my hands—I . . ."

Ellery grew silent suddenly. He looked over at his

father. The Inspector seemed strangely old in the flickering light of the fire. An expression of pain humanized the deeply sculptured lines of his face. His hand, brushing back his thick grey hair, looked alarmingly fragile.

Ellery rose, hesitated, colored, then bent swiftly forward and patted his father on the shoulder.

"Brace up, dad," he said in a low voice. "If it weren't for my arrangements with Chauvin. . . . Everything will be all right—take my word for it. If there were the slightest way in which I could help you by remaining. . . . But there isn't. It's your job now, dad—and there's no man in the world who can handle it better than you. . . ." The old man stared up at him with a strange affection. Ellery turned abruptly away. "Well," he said lightly, "I'll have to pack now if I expect to make the 7:45 out of Grand Central to-morrow morning."

He disappeared into the bedroom. Djuna, who had been sitting Turkish-wise in his corner, got quietly to his feet and crossed the room to the Inspector's chair. He slipped to the floor, his head resting against the old man's knees. The silence was punctuated by the snapping of wood in the fireplace and the muffled sounds of Ellery moving about in the next room.

Inspector Queen was very tired. His face, worn, thin, white, lined, was like a cameo in the dull red light. His hand caressed Djuna's curly head.

"Djuna, lad," he muttered, "never be a policeman when you grow up."

Djuna twisted his neck and stared gravely at the old man. "I'm going to be just what you are," he announced. . . .

The old man leaped to his feet as the telephone bell rang. He snatched the instrument from its table, his face livid, and said in a choked voice: "Queen speaking. Well?"

After a time he put down the 'phone and trudged across

the room toward the bedroom. He leaned against the lintel heavily. Ellery straightened up from his suitcase—and jumped forward.

“Dad!” he cried. “What’s the matter?”

The Inspector essayed a feeble smile. “Just—a—little tired, son, I guess,” he grunted. “I just heard from our housebreaker. . . .”

“And—?”

“He found absolutely nothing.”

Ellery gripped his father’s arm and led him to the chair by the bed. The old man slumped into it, his eyes ineffably weary. “Ellery, old son,” he said, “the last shred of evidence is gone. It’s maddening! Not a morsel of physical, tangible evidence that would convict the murderer in court. What have we? A series of perfectly sound deductions—and that’s all. A good lawyer would make Swiss cheese out of our case. . . . Well! The last word hasn’t been spoken yet,” he added with a sudden grimness as he rose from the chair. He pounded Ellery’s broad back in returning vigor.

“Get to bed, son,” he said. “You’ve got to get up early to-morrow morning. I’m going to sit up and think.”

INTERLUDE

IN WHICH THE READER'S ATTENTION
IS RESPECTFULLY REQUESTED

THE current vogue in detective literature is all for the practice of placing the reader in the position of chief sleuth. I have prevailed upon Mr. Ellery Queen to permit at this point in *THE ROMAN HAT MYSTERY* the interpolation of a challenge to the reader. . . . "Who killed Monte Field?" "How was the murder accomplished?" . . . Mr. Queen agrees with me that the alert student of mystery tales, now being in possession of all the pertinent facts, should at this stage of the story have reached definite conclusions on the questions propounded. The solution—or enough of it to point unerringly to the guilty character—may be reached by a series of logical deductions and psychological observations. . . . In closing my last personal appearance in the tale let me admonish the reader with a variation of the phrase *Caveat Emptor*: "Let the reader beware!"

J. J. McC.

PART FOUR

"The perfect criminal is a superman. He must be meticulous in his technique: unseen, unseeable, a Lone Wolf. He must have neither friends nor dependents. He must be careful to a fault, quick of brain, hand and foot. . . . But these are nothing. There have been such men. . . . On the other hand, he must be a favored child of Fate—for circumstances over which he cannot have the remotest control must never contrive his downfall. This, I think, is more difficult to achieve. . . . But the last is most difficult of all. He must never repeat his crime, his weapon or his motive! . . . In all my two-score years as an official of the American police I have not once encountered the perfect criminal nor investigated the perfect crime."

—FROM AMERICAN CRIME AND METHODS
OF DETECTION,
By Richard Queen.

CHAPTER XIX

IN WHICH INSPECTOR QUEEN CONDUCTS MORE LEGAL CONVERSATIONS

IT was notable, particularly to District Attorney Sampson, that on Saturday evening Inspector Richard Queen was far from being himself. The old man was irritable, snappish and utterly uncongenial. He paced fretfully across the carpet of Manager Louis Panzer's office, biting his lips and muttering beneath his breath. He seemed oblivious to the presence of Sampson, Panzer and a third person who had never been in that theatrical sanctum before and was seated, mouse-like, in one of Panzer's big chairs, his eyes like saucers. This was bright-eyed Djuna, granted the unprecedented privilege of accompanying his grey patron on this latest incursion into the Roman Theatre.

In truth, Queen was singularly depressed. He had many times in his official life been confronted by apparently insoluble problems; he had as many times brought triumph out of failure. The Inspector's strange manner therefore was doubly inexplicable to Sampson, who had been associated with the old man for years and had never seen him so completely unstrung.

The old man's moodiness was not due to the progress of the Field investigation, as Sampson worriedly thought. Wiry little Djuna, sitting open-mouthed in his corner, was the only spectator to the Inspector's mad pacing who could have put his finger on the truth. Djuna, wise by virtue of *gamin* perspicacity, observant by nature, familiar with Queen's temperament through a loving association, knew

that his patron's manner was due solely to Ellery's absence from the scene. Ellery had left New York on the 7:45 express that morning, having been gloomily accompanied to the station by his father. At the last moment the younger man had changed his mind, announcing his decision to forego the trip to Maine and abide in New York by his father's side until the case was concluded. The old man would have none of it. With his shrewd insight into Ellery's nature, he realized how keenly his highly strung son had been looking forward to this first vacation in over a year. It was not in his heart, impatient as he was for the constant presence of his son, to deprive him of this long contemplated pleasure trip.

Accordingly, he had swept aside Ellery's proposal and pushed him up the steps of the train, with a parting clap and a wan smile. Ellery's last words, shouted from the platform as the train glided out of the station, were: "I'm not forgetting you, dad. You'll hear from me sooner than you expect!"

Now, torturing the nap of Manager Panzer's rug, the Inspector was feeling the full impact of their separation. His brain was addled, his constitution flabby, his stomach weak, his eyes dim. He felt completely out of tune with the world and its denizens, and he made no attempt to conceal his irritation.

"Should be about time now, Panzer," he growled to the stout little manager. "How long does this infernal audience take to clear out, anyway?"

"In a moment, Inspector, in a moment," replied Panzer. The District Attorney sniffed away the remnants of his cold. Djuna stared in fascination at his god.

A rap on the door twisted their heads about. Tow-headed Harry Neilson, the publicity man, poked his rugged face into the room. "Mind if I join the little party, Inspector?" he inquired cheerfully. "I was in at the birth,

and if there's going to be a death—why, I'm aiming to stick around, with your permission!"

The Inspector shot him a dour glare from beneath his shaggy eyebrows. He stood in a Napoleonic attitude, his every hair and muscle bristling with ill-nature. Sampson regarded him in surprise. Inspector Queen was showing an unexpected side to his temper.

"Might's well," he barked. "One more won't hurt. There's an army here as it is."

Neilson reddened slightly and made a move as if to withdraw. The Inspector's eye twinkled with a partial return to good spirits.

"Here—sit down, Neilson," he said, not unkindly. "Mustn't mind an old fogey like me. I'm just frazzled a bit. Might need you to-night at that."

"Glad to be let in on it, Inspector," grinned Neilson. "What's the idea—sort of Spanish Inquisition?"

"Just about." The old man bent his brows. "But—we'll see."

At this moment the door opened and the tall, broad figure of Sergeant Velie stepped quickly into the room. He was carrying a sheet of paper which he handed to the Inspector.

"All present, sir," he said.

"Everybody out?" snapped Queen.

"Yes, sir. I've told the cleaning-women to go down into the lounge and hang around until we're through. Cashiers have gone home, so have the ushers and usherettes. Cast is backstage, I guess, getting dressed."

"Right. Let's go, gentlemen." The Inspector stalked out of the room followed closely by Djuna, who had not opened his mouth all evening except to emit noiseless gasps of admiration, for no reason that the amused District Attorney could see. Panzer, Sampson and Neilson also followed, Velie bringing up the rear.

The auditorium was again a vast and deserted place, the empty rows of seats stark and cold. The lights of the theatre had been switched on in full and their cold radiance lit up every corner of the orchestra.

As the five men and Djuna swung toward the extreme left aisle, there was a concerted bobbing of heads from the left section of seats. It was apparent now that a small group of people were awaiting the arrival of the Inspector, who walked heavily down the aisle and took up a position in front of the left boxes, so that all the seated people faced him. Panzer, Neilson and Sampson stood at the head of the aisle with Djuna at one side, a feverish spectator.

The assembled party was placed peculiarly. From the row nearest the Inspector, who stood about half-way down the orchestra, and proceeding towards the rear the only seats occupied were those directly on the left aisle. The end two seats of the dozen rows were filled by a motley aggregation—men and women, old and young. They were the same people who had occupied these chairs on the night of the fatal performance and whom Inspector Queen had personally examined after the discovery of the body. In the section of eight seats—Monte Field's and the empty ones which had surrounded it—were grouped William Pusak, Esther Jablow, Madge O'Connell, Jess Lynch and Parson Johnny—the Parson furtive-eyed, uneasy and whispering to the usherette behind nicotined fingers.

At the Inspector's sudden gesture all became silent as the grave. Sampson, looking about him at the bright chandeliers and lights, the deserted theatre, the lowered curtain, could not help feeling that the stage was being set for dramatic revelations. He leaned forward interestedly. Panzer and Neilson were quiet and watchful. Djuna kept his eyes fixed on the old man.

"Ladies and gentlemen," Queen announced curtly, staring at the assembled company, "I've brought you here for

a definite purpose. I will not keep you any longer than is absolutely necessary, but what is necessary and what is not necessary is entirely up to me. If I find that I do not receive what I consider truthful answers to my questions, everybody will stay here until I am satisfied. I want that thoroughly understood before we proceed."

He paused and glared about. There was a ripple of apprehension, a sudden crackle of conversation which died as quickly as it was born.

"On Monday night," continued the Inspector frostily, "you people attended the performance at this theatre and, with the exception of certain employees and others now seated at the rear, occupied the seats in which you now find yourselves." Sampson grinned as he noticed the stiffening of backs at these words, as if each individual felt his seat grow suddenly warm and uncomfortable beneath him.

"I want you to imagine that this is Monday night. I want you to think back to that night and try to remember everything that happened. By everything I mean any occurrence, no matter how trivial or apparently unimportant, that might have left an impression on your memory. . . ."

As the Inspector warmed to his words, a number of people drifted into the orchestra at the rear. Sampson greeted them in whispers. The little party was composed of Eve Ellis, Hilda Orange, Stephen Barry, James Peale and three or four other members of the cast of "Gunplay." They were dressed in their street-clothes. Peale whispered to Sampson that they had just come from their dressing-rooms and had dropped into the auditorium on hearing voices.

"Queen's holding a little pow-wow," whispered Sampson in return.

"Do you think the Inspector has any objections to our

staying a while and listening?" asked Barry in a low tone, with an apprehensive glance toward the Inspector, who had stopped and was staring icily in their direction.

"Don't see why—" began Sampson worriedly, when Eve Ellis murmured "Shhh!" and they all became silent.

"Now—" said the Inspector venomously, when the flurry had subsided, "this is the situation. Remember, you are now back in Monday evening. The curtain has gone up on the second act and the theatre is dark. There is a lot of noise from the stage and you are intent on the exciting sequences of the play. . . . Did any of you, especially those sitting in the aisle seats, notice anything peculiar, unusual or disturbing around or near you at that time?"

He paused expectantly. There were puzzled, fearful shakings of the head. No one answered.

"Think hard," growled the Inspector. "You remember on Monday night I went down this aisle and questioned all of you in the same vein. Naturally I don't want lies, and I can't reasonably expect that you will tell me something startling now when you could remember nothing Monday night. But this is a desperate situation. A man was murdered here and we are frankly up against it. One of the most difficult cases we have ever encountered! In the light of such a condition, when we find ourselves against a blank wall with not the slightest idea where to turn—I am being honest with you as I expect you to be with me—I *must* turn to you as the only members of the audience five nights ago who were in a position to see something important, if anything important occurred. . . . It has been my experience that often, under stress of nervousness and excitement, a man or woman will forget a little detail that returns to memory after a few hours, days, weeks of normalcy. It is my hope that something of the sort has taken place with you. . . ."

As Inspector Queen spoke, the words dropping acidly from his lips, the company lost its nervousness in its fascinated interest. When he paused, people put their heads together and whispered excitedly, shaking their heads at times, arguing in fierce, low tones at others. The Inspector waited in a resigned patience.

"Raise your hands if you have something to tell me. . . ." he said.

A woman's timid white hand fluttered aloft.

"Yes, madam?" commanded Queen, pointing his finger. "Do you recall anything unusual?"

A withered old lady rose embarrassedly to her feet and began to stammer in a squeaking voice. "I don't know whether it's important or not, sir," she said tremulously. "But I do remember some time during the second act a woman, I think it was, walking down the aisle and a few seconds later walking up again."

"Yes? That's interesting, madam," commented the Inspector. "About what time was this—can you recall?"

"I don't remember the time, sir," shrilled the old lady, "but it was about ten minutes or so after the beginning of the act."

"I see. . . . And do you recall anything of her appearance? Was she young or old? What did she wear?"

The old lady looked troubled. "I don't exactly remember, sir," she quavered. "I wasn't paying—"

A high, clear voice interrupted from the rear. Heads twisted about. Madge O'Connell had jumped to her feet.

"You don't have to mess around with that any more, Inspector," she announced coldly. "That lady saw *me* walking down the aisle and back again. That was before I—you know." She winked pertly in the Inspector's direction.

People gasped. The old lady stared with pitiful bewil-

derment at the usherette, then at the Inspector and finally sat down.

"I'm not surprised," said the Inspector quietly. "Well, anybody else?"

There was no answer. Realizing that the company might feel shy of announcing their thoughts in public Queen started up the aisle, working from row to row, questioning each person separately in tones inaudible to the rest. When he had finished he returned slowly to his original position.

"I see that I must allow you ladies and gentlemen to return to your peaceful firesides. Thank you very much for your help. . . . Dismissed!"

He flung the word at them. They stared at him dazedly, then rose in muttering groups, took up their coats and hats and under Velie's stern eye began to file out of the theatre. Hilda Orange, standing in the group behind the last row, sighed.

"It's almost embarrassing to see that poor old gentleman's disappointment," she whispered to the others. "Come on, folks, let's be going, too."

The actors and actresses left the theatre among the departing company.

When the last man and woman had disappeared, the Inspector marched back up the aisle and stood gloomily staring at the little group who were left. They seemed to sense the seething fire in the old man and they cowered. But the Inspector, with a characteristic lightning change of front, became human again.

He sat down in one of the seats and folded his arms over the back, surveying Madge O'Connell, Parson Johnny and the others.

"All right, folks," he said in a genial tone. "How about you, Parson? You're a free man, you don't have to worry about silks any more and you can speak up now like any

self-respecting citizen. Can you give us any help in this affair?"

"Naw," grunted the little gangster. "I told you all I knew. Ain't got a thing to say."

"I see. . . . You know, Parson, that we're interested in your dealings with Field." The gangster looked up in shocked surprise. "Oh, yes," continued the Inspector. "We want you to tell us sometime about your business with Mr. Field in the past. You'll keep that in mind, won't you? . . . Parson," he said sharply, "who killed Monte Field? Who had it in for him? If you know—out with it!"

"Aw, Inspector," the Parson whined, "you ain't pullin' that stuff on me again, are you? How should I know? Field was one slick guy—he didn't go around welching on his enemies. No, sir! I wouldn't know. . . . He was pretty good to me—got me off on a couple of charges," he admitted unblushingly. "But I didn't have no more idea he was here Monday night than—hell, than anything."

The Inspector turned to Madge O'Connell.

"How about you, O'Connell?" he asked softly. "My son, Mr. Queen, tells me that on Monday night you confided in him about closing the exit-doors. You didn't say anything to me about that. What do *you* know?"

The girl returned his stare coolly. "I told you once, Inspector. I haven't a thing to say."

"And you, William Pusak—" Queen turned to the weazened little bookkeeper. "Do you remember anything now that you forgot Monday night?"

Pusak wriggled uncomfortably. "Meant to tell you, Inspector," he mumbled. "And when I read about it in the papers it came back to me. . . . As I bent over Mr. Field Monday night I smelled a terrible smell of whiskey. I don't remember if I told you that before."

"Thank you," remarked the Inspector dryly, rising. "A

very important contribution to our little investigation. You may go, the whole lot of you. . . ."

The orangeade-boy, Jess Lynch, looked disappointed. "Don't you want to talk to me, too, sir?" he asked anxiously.

The Inspector smiled despite his abstraction. "Ah, yes. The helpful purveyor of orangeade. . . . And what have you to say, Jess?"

"Well, sir, before this fellow Field came over to my stand to ask for the ginger ale, I happened to notice that he picked up something in the alleyway," said the boy eagerly. "It was shiny, sort of, but I couldn't see it clear enough. He put it in his hip-pocket right away."

He concluded triumphantly, glancing about him as if to invite applause. The Inspector seemed interested enough.

"What was this shiny object like, Jess?" he inquired. "Might it have been a revolver?"

"Revolver? Gosh, I don't think so," said the orangeade-boy doubtfully. "It was square, like. . . ."

"Might it have been a woman's purse?" interrupted the Inspector.

The boy's face brightened. "That's it!" he cried. "I'll bet that's what it was. Shined all over, like colored stones."

Queen sighed. "Very good, Lynch," he said. "You go home now like a good boy."

Silently the gangster, the usherette, Pusak and his feminine charge, and the orangeade-boy rose and departed. Velie accompanied them to the outer door.

Sampson waited until they had gone before he took the Inspector to one side.

"What's the matter, Q?" he demanded. "Aren't things going right?"

"Henry, my boy," smiled the Inspector, "we've done as much as mortal brains could. Just a little more time. . . ."

I wish—" He did not say what he wished. He grasped Djuna firmly by the arm and bidding Panzer, Neilson, Velie and the District Attorney a placid good-night, left the theatre.

At the apartment, as the Inspector wielded his key and the door swung open, Djuna pounced on a yellow envelope lying on the floor. It had evidently been stuck through the crack at the bottom of the door. Djuna flourished it in the old man's face.

"It's from Mr. Ellery, I'll bet!" he cried. "I knew he wouldn't forget!" He seemed more extraordinarily like a monkey than ever as he stood grinning, the telegram in his hand.

The Inspector snatched the envelope from Djuna's hand and, not pausing to take off his hat or coat, switched on the lights in the living-room and eagerly extracted the yellow slip of paper.

Djuna had been correct.

ARRIVED SAFELY [it ran] CHAUVIN WILD WITH DELIGHT
FISHING PROSPECT EXCEPTIONAL stop THINK I HAVE
SOLVED YOUR LITTLE PROBLEM stop JOIN DISTINGUISHED
COMPANY OF RABELAIS CHAUCER SHAKESPEARE DRYDEN
WHO SAID MAKE A VIRTUE OF NECESSITY stop WHY NOT
GO INTO BLACKMAILING BUSINESS YOURSELF stop DONT
GROWL DJUNA TO DEATH AFFECTIONATELY ELLERY

The Inspector stared down at the harmless yellow slip, a startled comprehension transmuting the harsh lines of his face.

He whirled on Djuna, clapped that young gentleman's cap on his tousled head and pulled his arm purposefully.

"Djuna, old son," he said gleefully, "let's go around the corner and celebrate with a couple of ice-cream sodas!"

CHAPTER XX

IN WHICH MR. MICHAELS WRITES A LETTER

FOR the first time in a week Inspector Queen was genuinely himself as he strode cheerfully into his tiny office at the headquarters building and shied his coat at a chair.

It was Monday morning. He rubbed his hands, hummed "The Sidewalks of New York," as he plumped down at his desk and briskly ran through his voluminous mail and reports. He spent a half-hour issuing instructions by word of mouth and telephone to subordinates in various offices of the Detective Bureau, studied briefly a number of reports which a stenographer placed before him and finally pressed one of a row of buttons on his desk.

Velie appeared at once.

"Howdy, Thomas," said the Inspector heartily. "How are you this fine Fall morning?"

Velie permitted himself a smile. "Well enough, Inspector," he said. "And you? You seemed a little under the weather Saturday night."

The Inspector chuckled. "Let bygones be bygones, Thomas my lad. Djuna and I visited the Bronx Zoo yesterday and spent a delightful four hours among our brethren, the animals."

"That imp of yours was in his element, I'll bet," growled Velie, "among the monkeys especially."

"Now, now, Thomas," chided the Inspector. "Don't be mistaken about Djuna. He's a smart little whippersnapper. Going to be a great man some day, mark my words!"

"Djuna?" Velie nodded gravely. "Guess you're right,

Inspector. I'd give my right paw for that kid. . . . What's the program to-day, sir?"

"There's a lot on the program to-day, Thomas," Queen said mysteriously. "Did you get hold of Michaels after I telephoned you yesterday morning?"

"Sure thing, Inspector. He's been waiting outside for an hour. Came in early, with Piggott hanging on his heels. Piggott's been tailing him all over creation and he's pretty disgusted."

"Well, I always said a man's a fool to become a policeman," chuckled Queen. "Bring in the lamb."

Velie went out, to reappear a moment later with the tall, portly Michaels. Field's valet was dressed sombrely. He seemed nervous and ill at ease.

"Now, Thomas, my lad," said the Inspector after he had motioned Michaels to the chair beside his desk, "you go out and lock that door and don't let the Commissioner himself disturb me. Get that?"

Velie repressed a curious glance, grunted and departed. A few moments later a bulky figure was dimly discernible in silhouette through the frosted glass of the door.

At the expiration of a half-hour Velie was summoned by telephone to his superior's office. He unlocked the door. On the desk before the Inspector reposed a cheap square envelope unsealed, a sheet of notepaper partly visible as it lay inside. Michaels was on his feet, pale and trembling, his hat crushed in two beefy hands. Velie's sharp eyes noticed a generous ink-stain on the fingers of the man's left hand.

"You are going to take *very* good care of Mr. Michaels, Thomas," said the Inspector genially. "To-day, for instance, I want you to entertain him. I have no doubt you'll find something to do—go to a movie—there's an idea! In any event be friendly with the gentleman until you hear from me. . . . No communication with any-

body, Michaels, do you hear?" he added brusquely, turning to the big man. "Just you tag along with Sergeant Velie and play nicely."

"You know I'm on the square, Inspector," mumbled Michaels sullenly. "You don't have to—"

"Just a precaution, Michaels—just an elementary precaution," interrupted the Inspector, smiling. "Have a nice time, boys!"

The two men left. Seated at his desk, Queen tilted his swivel chair, picked up the envelope before him reflectively, took out the slip of cheap white paper and read it over with a little smile.

The note bore neither date nor salutation. The message began abruptly.

"The writer is Chas. Michaels, I think you know me. I have been Monte Field's right-hand man for over two years.

I won't beat around the bush. Last Monday night you killed Field in the Roman Theatre. Monte Field told me Sunday he had an appointment with you at the Theatre. And I am the only one who does know this.

Another thing. I also know *why* you killed him. You put him away to get hold of the papers in Field's hat. But you do not know that the papers you stole from him *are not the originals*. To prove this to you, I am enclosing one sheet from the testimony of Nellie Johnson which was in Field's possession. If the papers you took from Field's hat are still in existence, compare what you have with this one. You will soon see that I am giving you the straight goods. And I have the rest of the originals safely put away where you will never lay hands on them. I might say that the police are looking for them with their tongues hanging out. Wouldn't it be nice if I stepped into Inspector Queen's office with the papers and my little story?

I will give you a chance to buy these papers. You can bring \$25,000 in cold cash to the place I describe, and I will hand them over to you. I need money and you need the papers and my silence.

Meet me to-morrow, Tuesday night, at twelve o'clock, at the seventh bench on the right-hand side of the paved path in Central Park which starts at the northwest corner of 59th Street and 5th Avenue. I will be dressed in a gray overcoat and a gray slouch hat. Just say the word Papers to me.

This is the only way you can get the papers. Don't look for me before the appointment. If you are not there, I know what I have to do."

The scrawl, closely and painfully written, was signed: "Charles Michaels."

Inspector Queen sighed, licked the flap of the envelope and sealed it. He stared steadily at the name and address written in the same handwriting on the envelope. Unhurriedly he affixed a stamp on one corner.

He pressed another button. The door opened to admit Detective Ritter.

"Good morning, Inspector."

"Morning, Ritter." The Inspector weighed the envelope reflectively in his hand. "What are you working on now?"

The detective shuffled his feet. "Nothing special, Inspector. I was helping Sergeant Velie up to Saturday, but I haven't had any work yet on the Field case this morning."

"Well, then, I'll give you a nice little job." The Inspector suddenly grinned, holding out the envelope. Ritter took it with a bewildered air. "Here, son, go to the corner of 149th Street and Third Avenue and post this letter in the nearest mail-box!"

Ritter stared, scratched his head, looked at Queen and finally went out, depositing the letter in his pocket.

The Inspector tilted his chair and took a pinch of snuff with every evidence of satisfaction.

CHAPTER XXI

IN WHICH INSPECTOR QUEEN MAKES A CAPTURE—

ON Tuesday evening, October second, promptly at 11:30 P.M., a tall man wearing a soft black hat and a black overcoat, the collar pulled up around his face to keep out the raw night-air, sauntered out of the lobby of a small hotel on 53rd Street near Seventh Avenue and proceeded at a sharp pace up Seventh Avenue toward Central Park.

Arrived at 59th Street he turned to the east and made his way along the deserted thoroughfare in the direction of Fifth Avenue. When he reached the Fifth Avenue entrance to Central Park, off the Plaza circle, he stopped in the shadow of one of the big concrete corner-posts and leaned back idly. As he lit a cigarette the flare from the match illumined his face. It was that of an elderly man, a trifle lined. A grizzled mustache drooped in a straggling line from his upper lip. Under his hat a grey patch of hair was visible. Then the light from the match flickered out.

He stood quietly against the concrete post, hands jammed into his overcoat pockets, puffing away at his cigarette. An observer would have noticed, had he been keen, that the man's fingers trembled slightly and that his black-shod feet tapped the sidewalk in an unsteady tattoo.

When his cigarette burned down, he threw it away and glanced at a watch on his wrist. The hands stood at 11:50. He swore impatiently and stepped past the portals of the Park entrance.

The light from the overhead arcs bordering the Plaza dimmed as he walked up the stone lane. Hesitating, as if he were undecided as to his course of action, he looked about him, considered for a moment, then crossed over to the first bench and sat down heavily—like a man tired from his day's work and contemplating a restful quarter of an hour in the silence and darkness of the Park.

Slowly his head drooped; slowly his figure grew slack. He seemed to have fallen into a doze.

The minutes ticked away. No one passed the quiet figure of the black-clad man as he sat on his bench. On Fifth Avenue the motors roared past. The shrill whistle of the traffic officer in the Plaza pierced the chill air periodically. A cold wind soughed through the trees. From somewhere in the Stygian recesses of the Park came a girl's clear laugh—soft and far-off, but startlingly distinct. The minutes drowsed on; the man was falling into a deeper sleep.

And yet, just as the bells of the neighborhood churches began to toll the hour of twelve, the figure tensed, waited an instant and then rose determinedly.

Instead of heading toward the entrance he turned and plodded farther up the walk, his eyes bright and inquisitive in the gloomy depths created by his hat-brim and coat-collar. He seemed to be counting the benches as he proceeded in a steady, unhurried gait. Two—three—four—five— He stopped. In the semi-darkness ahead he could barely make out a still grey figure seated on a bench.

The man walked slowly on. Six—seven— He did not pause, but went straight ahead. Eight—nine—ten. . . . Only then did he wheel and retrace his steps. This time his gait was brisker, more definite. He approached the seventh bench rapidly, then stopped short. Suddenly, as if he had made up his mind, he crossed over to the spot where the indistinctly looming figure rested quietly and

sat down. The figure grunted and moved over a trifle to give the newcomer more room.

The two men sat in silence. After a time the black-garbed man dipped into the folds of his coat and produced a packet of cigarettes. He lit one and held the match for a moment after the tip of the cigarette glowed red. In the ray of the match-light he covertly examined the quiet man at his side. The brief moment told him little—the occupant of the bench was as well-muffled and concealed as himself. Then the light puffed out and they were in darkness once more.

The black-coated man seemed to come to a decision. He leaned forward, tapped the other man sharply on the knee and said in a low, husky voice the one word:

"Papers!"

The second man came to life immediately. He half-shifted his position, scrutinized his companion and grunted as if in satisfaction. He carefully leaned away from the other man on the bench and with his right gloved hand dug into his right overcoat pocket. The first man bent eagerly forward, his eyes bright. The gloved hand of his companion came out of the pocket, holding something tightly.

Then the owner of the hand did a surprising thing. With a fierce bunching of muscles he sprang from the bench and leaped backward, away from the first man. At the same time he leveled his right hand straight at the crouched frozen figure. And a fragmentary gleam of light from an arc-lamp far off revealed the thing he held in his hand—a revolver.

Crying out hoarsely, the first man sprang to his feet with the agility of a cat. His hand plunged with a lightning-like movement into his overcoat pocket. He darted, reckless of the weapon pointed at his heart, straight forward at the tense figure before him.

But things were happening. The peaceful tableau, so suggestive a bare instant before of open spaces and dark country silence, was transformed magically into a scene of intense activity—a writhing, yelling pandemonium. From a cluster of bushes a few feet behind the bench a swiftly moving group of men with drawn guns materialized. At the same time, from the farther side of the walk, a similar group appeared, running toward the pair. And from both ends of the walk—from the entrance about a hundred feet away and from the opposite direction, in the blackness of the Park—came several uniformed policemen, brandishing revolvers. The four groups converged almost as one.

The man who had drawn his gun and leaped from the bench did not await the arrival of reënforcements. As his companion of a moment before plunged his hand into his coat pocket the gun-wielder took careful aim and fired. The weapon roared, awakening echoes in the Park. An orange flame streaked into the body of the black-coated man. He lurched forward, clutching his shoulder spasmodically. His knees buckled and he fell to the stone walk. His hand still fumbled in his coat.

But an avalanche of men's bodies kept him from whatever furious purpose was in his mind. Ungentle fingers gripped his arms and pinned them down, so that he could not withdraw his hand from his pocket. They held him in this way, silently, until a crisp voice behind them said, "Careful, boys—watch his hands!"

Inspector Richard Queen wriggled into the hard-breathing group and stood contemplatively above the writhing figure on the pavement.

"Take his hand out, Velie—easy, now! Hold it stiff, and—stiff, man, stiff! He'd jab you in a flash!"

Sergeant Thomas Velie, who was straining at the arm, gingerly pulled it from the pocket despite the violent

flounderings of the man's body. The hand appeared—empty, muscles loosened at the last moment. Two men promptly fastened it in a vise.

Velie made a movement as if to explore the pocket. The Inspector stopped him with a sharp word and himself bent over the threshing man on the walk.

Carefully, delicately, as if his life depended upon caution, the old man lowered his hand into the pocket and felt about its exterior. He gripped something and just as cautiously withdrew it, holding it up to the light.

It was a hypodermic needle. The light of the arc-lamp made its pale limpid contents sparkle.

Inspector Queen grinned as he knelt by the wounded man's side. He jerked off the black felt hat.

"Disguised and everything," he murmured.

He snatched at the grey mustache, passed his hand rapidly over the man's lined face. A smudge immediately appeared on the skin.

"Well, well!" said the Inspector softly, as the man's feverish eyes glared up at him. "Happy to meet you again, Mr. Stephen Barry, and your good friend, Mr. Tetra Ethyl Lead!"

CHAPTER XXII

—AND EXPLAINS

INSPECTOR QUEEN sat at the writing-desk in his living-room scribbling industriously on a long narrow sheet of note-paper headed THE QUEENS.

It was Wednesday morning—a fair Wednesday morning, with the sun streaming into the room through the dormer windows and the cheerful noises of 87th Street faintly audible from the pavements below. The Inspector wore his dressing-gown and slippers. Djuna was busy at the table clearing away the breakfast dishes.

The old man had written:

DEAR SON: As I wired you late last night, the case is finished. We got Stephen Barry very nicely by using Michaels' name and handwriting as bait. I really ought to congratulate myself on the psychological soundness of the plan. Barry was desperate and like so many other criminals thought he could duplicate his crime without being caught.

I hate to tell you how tired I am and how unsatisfying spiritually the job of man-hunter is sometimes. When I think of that poor lovely little girl Frances, having to face the world as the sweetheart of a murderer. . . . Well, El, there's little justice and certainly no mercy in this world. And, of course, I'm more or less responsible for her shame. . . . Yet Ives-Pope himself was quite decent a while ago when he telephoned me on hearing the news. I suppose in one way I did him and Frances a service. We—"

The doorbell rang and Djuna, drying his hands hastily on a kitchen towel, ran to the door. District Attorney

Sampson and Timothy Cronin walked in—excited, happy, both talking at once. Queen rose, covering the sheet of paper with a blotter.

"Q, old man!" cried Sampson, extending both hands. "My congratulations! Have you seen the papers this morning?"

"Glory to Columbus!" grinned Cronin, holding up a newspaper on which in screaming head-lines New York was apprised of the capture of Stephen Barry. The Inspector's photograph was displayed prominently and a rhapsodic story captioned "Queen Adds Another Laurel" ran two full columns of type down the sheet.

The Inspector, however, seemed singularly unimpressed. He waved his visitors to chairs, and called for coffee, and began to talk about a projected change in the personnel of one of the city departments as if the Field case interested him not at all.

"Here, here!" growled Sampson. "What's the matter with you? You ought to be throwing out your chest, Q. You act as if you'd pulled a dud rather than succeeded."

"It's not that, Henry," said the Inspector with a sigh. "I just can't seem to be enthusiastic about anything when Ellery isn't by my side. By jingo, I wish he were here instead of in those blamed Maine woods!"

The two men laughed. Djuna served the coffee and for a time the Inspector was too occupied with his pastry to brood. Over his cigarette Cronin remarked: "I for one merely dropped in to pay my respects, Inspector, but I'm curious about some aspects of this case. . . . I don't know much about the investigation as a whole, except what Sampson told me on the way up."

"I'm rather at sea myself, Q," put in the District Attorney. "I imagine you have a story to tell us. Let's have it!"

Inspector Queen smiled sadly. "To save my own face I'll have to relate it as if I did most of the work. As a matter of fact, the only really intelligent work in the whole sordid business was Ellery's. "He's a sharp lad, that son of mine."

Sampson and Cronin relaxed as the Inspector took some snuff and settled back in his armchair. Djuna folded himself quietly in a corner, ears cocked.

"In going over the Field case," began the Inspector, "I will have to refer at times to Benjamin Morgan, who is really the most innocent victim of all.* I want you to bear in mind, Henry, that whatever I say about Morgan is to go no further, either professionally or socially. I already have Tim's assurance of silence. . . ."

Both men nodded wordlessly. The Inspector continued:

"I needn't explain that most investigations of crime begin with a search for the motive. Many times you can discard suspect after suspect when you know the reason behind the crime. In this case the motive was obscure for a long time. There were certain indications, like Benjamin Morgan's story, but these were inconclusive. Morgan had been blackmailed by Field for years—a part of Field's activities of which you gentlemen were ignorant, despite your knowledge of his other social habits. This seemed to point to blackmail as a possible motive—or rather the choking off of blackmail. But then any number of things could have been the motive—revenge, for example, by some criminal whom Field had been instrumental in 'sending up.' Or by a member of his criminal organization. Field had a host of enemies, and undoubtedly a host of friends who were friends only because Field held the whip-hand. Any one of scores of people

* Inspector Queen's statement here is not altogether true. Benjamin Morgan was far from "innocent." But the Inspector's sense of justice compelled him to shield the lawyer and keep his word regarding silence.—E. Q.

—men and women both—might have had a *motive* for killing the lawyer. So that, since we had so many other pressing and immediate things to think about and do that night at the Roman Theatre, we did not bother much with motive. It was always in the background, waiting to be called into service.

“But mark this point. If it was blackmail—as Ellery and I eventually decided, since it seemed the most likely possibility—there were most certainly some papers floating about in Field’s possession which would be enlightening, to say the least. We knew that Morgan’s papers existed. Cronin insisted that the papers for which *he* was looking were about somewhere. So we had to keep our eyes constantly on the alert for papers—tangible evidence which might or might not make clear the essential circumstances behind the crime.

“At the same time, in the matter of documents, Ellery was piqued by the great number of books on handwriting-analysis he found among Field’s effects. We concluded that a man like Field, who had blackmailed once to our knowledge (in the case of Morgan) and many times to our suspicions; and who was keenly interested in the science of handwriting, might have been a forger to boot. If this were true, and it seemed a plausible explanation, then it probably meant that Field made a habit of forging the original blackmail papers. The only reason he could have for doing this, of course, would be to sell the forgeries and keep the originals for further extortion. His association with the underworld undoubtedly helped him master the tricks of the trade. Later, we discovered that this hypothesis was true. And by that time we had definitely established blackmail as the motive of the crime. Remember, though, that this led us nowhere, since any one of our suspects might have been the blackmail victim and we had no way of telling who it was.”

The Inspector frowned, settled back into his seat more comfortably.

"But I'm tackling this explanation the wrong way. It just goes to show you how habit will take hold of a man. I'm so accustomed to beginning with motive. . . . However! There is only one important and central circumstance which stands out in the investigation. It was a confounding clue—rather, the lack of a clue. I refer to the missing hat. . . .

"Now the unfortunate thing about the missing hat was that we were so busy pressing the immediate inquiry at the Roman Theatre on Monday night we couldn't grasp the full significance of its absence. Not that we weren't bothered by it from the beginning—far from it. It was one of the first things I noticed when I examined the body. As for Ellery, he caught it as soon as he entered the theatre and bent over the dead man. But what could we do? There were a hundred details to take care of—questions to ask, orders to give, discrepancies and suspicious discoveries to clear up—so that, as I say, we inadvertently missed our great opportunity. If we had fully analyzed the meaning of the hat's disappearance then and there—we might have clinched the case that very night."

"Well, it hasn't taken so long after all, you growler," laughed Sampson. "This is Wednesday and the murder was committed a week ago Monday. Only nine days—what are you kicking about?"

The Inspector shrugged. "But it would have made a considerable difference," he said. "If only we had reasoned it out— Well! When finally we did get round to dissecting the problem of the hat, we asked ourselves first of all: Why was the hat taken? Only two answers seemed to make sense: one, that the hat was incriminating in itself; two, that it contained something which the murderer wanted and for which the crime was committed. As it

turned out, both were true. The hat was incriminating in itself because on the underside of the leather sweat-band was Stephen Barry's name, printed in indelible ink; and the hat contained something which the murderer very emphatically wanted—the blackmail papers. He thought at the time, of course, that they were the originals.

"This did not get us very far, but it was a starting-point. By the time we left Monday night with the command to shut down the theatre, we had not yet found the missing hat despite a sweeping search. However, we had no way of knowing whether the hat had managed in some mysterious manner to leave the theatre, or whether it was still there though unrevealed by our search. When we returned to the theatre on Thursday morning we settled once and for all the question of the location of Monte Field's pesky topper—that is, negatively. It was *not* in the theatre—that much was certain. And since the theatre had been sealed since Monday night, it follows that the hat must have left that same evening.

"Now everybody who left Monday night left with only one hat. In the light of our second search, therefore, we were compelled to conclude that somebody had walked out that night with Monte Field's hat in his hand or on his head, necessarily leaving his own in the theatre.

"He could not have disposed of the hat outside the theatre except when he left at the time the audience was allowed to leave; for up to that time all exits were guarded or locked, and the left-hand alley was blocked first by Jess Lynch and Elinor Libby, next by John Chase, the usher, and after that by one of my policemen. The right-hand alley, having no exit other than the orchestra doors, which were guarded all night, offered no avenue of disposal.

"To go on with the thought—since Field's hat was a top-hat, and since nobody left the theatre dressed in a top-hat who was not wearing evening clothes—this we watched for

very closely—therefore the man who took away the missing hat *must* have been garbed in full dress. You might say that a man planning such a crime in advance would have come to the theatre without a hat, and therefore would have none to dispose of. But if you will stop to think, you must see that this is highly improbable. He would have been quite conspicuous, especially while entering the theatre, if he went in minus a top-hat. It was a possibility, of course, and we kept it in mind; but we reasoned that a man working out such a consummate crime as this would have shied from taking any unnecessary chance of being identified. Also, Ellery had satisfied his own mind that the murderer had no foreknowledge of the Field hat's importance. This made still more improbable the possibility that the murderer arrived without a hat of his own. Having a hat of his own, he might have disposed of it, we thought, during the first intermission—which is to say, before the crime was committed. But Ellery's deductions proving the murderer's lack of foreknowledge made this impossible, since he would not have known at the first intermission of the *necessity* of doing away with his own hat. At any rate, I think we were justified in assuming that our man had to leave his own hat in the theatre and that it must have been a top-hat. Does it follow so far?"

"It seems logical enough," admitted Sampson, "though very complicated."

"You have no idea how complicated it was," said the Inspector grimly, "since at the same time we had to bear in mind the other possibilities—such as the man walking out with Field's hat being not the murderer but an accomplice. But let's get on.

"The next question we asked ourselves was this: what *happened* to the top-hat which the murderer left behind in the theatre? What did he do with it? Where did he

leave it? . . . I can tell you that was a puzzler. We had ransacked the place from top to bottom. True, we found several hats backstage which Mrs. Phillips, the wardrobe-mistress, identified as the personal property of various actors. But none of these was a personally owned tophat. Where then was the tophat which the murderer had left behind in the theatre? Ellery with his usual acumen struck right at the heart of the truth. He said to himself, 'The murderer's tophat must be here. We have not found any tophat whose presence is remarkable or out of the ordinary. Therefore the tophat we are seeking must be one whose presence is *not* out of the ordinary.' Fundamental? Almost ridiculously so. And yet I myself did not think of it.

"What tophats were there whose *presence* was not out of the ordinary—so natural and in so natural a place that they were not even questioned? In the Roman Theatre, where all the costumes were hired from Le Brun, the answer is simply: the rented tophats being used for purposes of the play. Where would such tophats be? Either in the actors' dressing-rooms or in the general wardrobe room backstage. When Ellery had reached this point in his reasoning he took Mrs. Phillips backstage and checked up on every tophat in the actors' rooms and the wardrobe room. Every tophat there—and all were accounted for, none being missing—was a property tophat bearing on its lining the Le Brun insignia. Field's hat, which we had proved to be a Browne Bros. topper, was not among the property tophats or anywhere backstage.

"Since no one left the theatre Monday night with more than one tophat, and since Monte Field's hat was unquestionably taken out of the theatre that same night, it was positively established that the murderer's own tophat must have been in the Roman all the time the house was sealed, and was still there at the time of our second search. Now,

the only tophats remaining in the theatre were property tophats. It therefore follows that the murderer's own tophat (which he was forced to leave behind because he walked out with Field's) *must* have been one of the property hats backstage, since, let me repeat, these were the only tophats of which it could physically have been one.

"In other words—one of these property tophats backstage belonged to the man who left the theatre Monday night in full dress wearing Field's silk topper.

"If this man were the murderer—and he could scarcely be anyone else—then our field of inquiry was narrowed to a considerable degree. He could only have been either a male member of the cast who left the theatre in evening clothes, or somebody closely connected with the theatre and similarly dressed. In the latter case, such a person would have had to have, first, a property tophat to leave behind; second, undisputed access to the wardrobe and dressing-rooms; and, third, the opportunity to leave his property tophat in either place.

"Now let us examine the possibilities in the latter case—that the murderer was closely connected with the theatre, yet not an actor." The Inspector paused to sniff deeply of the snuff in his treasured box. "The workmen backstage could be discarded because none of them wore the evening clothes which were necessary in order to take away Field's tophat. The cashiers, ushers, doormen and other minor employees were eliminated for the same reason. Harry Neilson, the publicity man, was also dressed in ordinary street clothes. Panzer, the manager, was attired in full dress, it is true, but I took the trouble to check up his head-size and found it to be $6\frac{3}{4}$ —an unusually small size. It would be virtually impossible for him to have *worn* Field's hat, which was $7\frac{1}{8}$. It is true that we left the theatre before he did. On my way out, however, I definitely instructed Thomas Velie to make no exception

in Panzer's case, but to search him as the others had been searched. I had examined Panzer's hat merely from a sense of duty while in his office earlier in the evening, and found it to be a derby. Velie subsequently reported that Panzer walked out with this derby on his head and no other hat in his possession. Now—if Panzer had been the man we were looking for, he might have walked out with Field's hat despite its larger size by merely holding it in his hand. But when he left with a derby, that was conclusive that he could not have taken away Field's hat, since the theatre was shut down immediately after his departure and no one—my men on duty saw to that—no one entered the premises until Thursday morning under my own eye. Theoretically it was possible for Panzer, or anyone else in the Roman personnel, to have been the murderer had he been able to secrete Field's tophat in the theatre. But this last hypothesis was dissipated by the report of Edmund Crewe, our official architectural expert, who definitely stated that there was no secret hiding-place anywhere in the Roman Theatre.

"The elimination of Panzer, Neilson and the employees left only the cast as possibilities. How we finally narrowed down the field of inquiry until we got to Barry, let's leave for the moment. The interesting part of this case is really the startling and complex series of deductions which gave us the truth purely through logical reasoning. I say 'us'—I should say Ellery. . . ."

"For a police Inspector you are certainly a shrinking violet," chuckled Cronin. "By gee, this is better than a detective-story. I ought to be working now, but since my boss seems to be as interested as I am—keep going, Inspector!"

Queen smiled, forging ahead.

"The fact that the murderer was traced to the cast," he continued, "answers a question which has probably

occurred to you and which certainly troubled us in the beginning. We could not at first understand why the theatre should have been chosen as a meeting-place for the transaction of secret business. When you stop to think about it, a theatre presents enormous disadvantages under ordinary circumstances. Extra tickets, to mention only one thing, have to be bought to insure privacy through empty seats in the vicinity. What a silly tangle to get into when other meeting-places are so much more convenient! A theatre is dark most of the time and disturbingly quiet. Any untoward noise or conversation is remarked. The crowds present a constant danger—one of recognition. However, all this is automatically explained when you realize that Barry was a member of the cast. From his standpoint the theatre was ideal—for who would dream of suspecting an actor of murder when the victim is found dead in the orchestra? Of course Field acquiesced, never suspecting what was in Barry's mind and that he was conniving his own death. Even if he were a little suspicious, you must remember that he was accustomed to dealing with dangerous people and probably felt capable of taking care of himself. This may have made him a little overconfident—we have no way, of course, of knowing.

"Let me get back to Ellery again—any favorite subject," continued the Inspector, with one of his recurrent dry chuckles. "Aside from these deductions about the hat—as a matter of fact, before the deductions were completely worked out—Ellery got his first indication of which way the wind blew during the meeting at the Ives-Pope house. It was clear that Field had not accosted Frances Ives-Pope in the alleyway between acts with merely flirtatious intentions. It seemed to Ellery that some connection existed between the two widely separated individuals. Now, this does not mean that Frances had

to be aware of the connection. She was positive that she had never heard of or seen Field before. We had no reason to doubt her and every reason to believe her. That possible connection might have been Stephen Barry, provided Stephen Barry and Field knew each other without Frances' knowledge. If, for example, Field had an appointment at the theatre Monday night with the actor and suddenly saw Frances, it was possible that in his half-drunken mood he would venture to approach her, especially since the subject he and Barry had in common concerned her so deeply. As for recognizing her—thousands of people who read the daily papers know every line of her features—she is a much-photographed young society lady. Field certainly would have acquainted himself with her description and appearance out of sheer thoroughness of business method. . . . But to return to the triangle-connection—Field, Frances, Barry—which I will go into in detail later. You realize that no one else in the cast except Barry, who was engaged to Frances and had been publicly announced as her fiancé, with pictures and all the rest of the journalistic business, could have satisfied so well the question: Why did Field accost Frances?

"The other disturbing factor concerning Frances—the discovery of her bag in Field's clothes—was plausibly explained by her dropping it in the natural excitement of the moment when the drunken lawyer approached her. This was later confirmed by Jess Lynch's testimony to the effect that he saw Field pick up Frances' bag. Poor girl—I feel sorry for her." The Inspector sighed.

"To get back to the hat—you'll notice we always return to that blasted top-piece," resumed Queen, after a pause. "I never knew of a case in which a single factor so dominated every aspect of the investigation. . . . Now mark this: Of the entire cast Barry was *the only one* who left the Roman Theatre Monday night dressed in evening

clothes and tophat. As Ellery watched at the main door Monday night while the people were filing out, his mind characteristically registered the fact that the entire cast, except Barry, left the theatre wearing street clothes; in fact, he even mentioned this to Sampson and me in Panzer's office later, although at the time neither of us realized its full significance. . . . Barry was therefore the only member of the cast who could have taken away Field's tophat. Think this over a moment and you will see that, in view of Ellery's hat-deductions, we could now pin the guilt to Barry's shoulders beyond the shadow of a doubt.

"Our next step was to witness the play, which we did the evening of the day on which Ellery made the vital deductions—Thursday. You can see why. We wanted to confirm our conclusion by seeing whether Barry had the *time* during the second act to commit the murder. And, amazingly enough, of all the members of the cast, Barry was the only one who did have the time. He was absent from the stage from 9:20—he opened the business of the act and left almost at once—until 9:50, when he returned to the stage to remain there until the act ended. This was incontrovertible—part of a fixed and unchanging time-schedule. Every other player was either on the stage all the time or else went on and off at extremely short intervals. This means that last Thursday night, more than five days ago—and the whole case took only nine days to consummate—we had solved our mystery. But solving the mystery of the murderer's identity was a far cry from bringing him to justice. You'll see why in a moment.

"The fact that the murderer could not enter until 9:30 or thereabouts explains why the torn edges of LL32 Left and LL30 Left did not coincide. It was necessary for Field and Barry, you see, to come in at different times. Field could not very well enter with Barry or even at a

noticeably late hour—the matter of secrecy was too important to Barry, and Field understood, or thought he did, how necessary it was for him to play the secret game.

"When we pinned the guilt on Barry Thursday night, we resolved to question subtly the other members of the cast as well as workmen backstage. We wanted to find out, of course, whether any one had actually seen Barry leave or return. As it happened, no one had. Everybody was busy either acting, redressing, or working backstage. We conducted this little investigation after the performance that night, when Barry had already left the theatre. And it was checkmate, right enough.

"We had already borrowed a seating-plan from Panzer. This map, together with the examination of the alleyway on the left and the dressing-room arrangement backstage—an examination made directly after the second act Thursday night—showed us how the murder was committed."

Sampson stirred. "I've been puzzling my wits about that," he confessed. "After all, Field was no babe-in-the-woods. This Barry must be a wizard, Q. How did he do it?"

"Every riddle is simple when you know the answer," retorted the Inspector. "Barry, whose freedom began at 9:20, immediately returned to his dressing-room, slapped on a quick but thorough facial disguise, donned an evening-cloak and the tophat which was part of his costume—you'll remember he was already dressed in evening-clothes—and slipped out of his room into the alley.

"Of course you can't be expected to know the topography of the theatre. There is a series of tiers in a wing of the building backstage, facing the left alley, which is made up of dressing-rooms. Barry's room is on the lowest tier, the door opening into the alleyway. There is a flight of iron steps leading down to the pavement.

"It was through this door that he quitted the dressing-room, walking through the dark alley while the side doors of the theatre were shut during Act II. He sneaked out into the street, since there was no guard at the head of the alley at that time—and he knew it—nor had Jess Lynch and his 'girl' arrived, luckily for him; and entered the theatre brazenly through the regular front entrance, as if he were a latecomer. He presented his ticket—LL30 Left—at the door, muffled in his cloak and of course well disguised. As he passed into the theatre he deliberately threw away his ticket-stub. This appeared to him to be a wise move, since he figured that if the ticket-stub were found there, it would point to a member of the audience and directly away from the stage. Also, if his plans fell through and he were later searched carefully, the finding of the stub on his person would be damning evidence. All in all, he thought his move not only misleading but protective."

"But how did he plan to get to the seat without being ushered to it—and therefore seen?" objected Cronin.

"He hadn't planned to evade the usher," returned the Inspector. "Naturally, he had hoped, since the play was well on and the theatre dark, to gain the last row, the nearest to the door, before the usher could approach. However, even if the usher forestalled him and escorted him to the seat he was well disguised and in the blackness of the theatre proof enough against recognition. So that, if things turned out as badly as possible for him, the most that would be remembered was that some man, unknown, barely describable in general contour, arrived during the second act. As it happened he was not accosted, since Madge O'Connell was luckily seated with her lover. He managed to slip into the seat next to Field without being noticed.

"Remember, what I've just told you," went on the Inspector, clearing his dry throat, "is not the result of de-

duction or investigation. We could have no means of discovering such facts. Barry made his confession last night and cleared up all these points. . . . Knowing the culprit was Barry, of course, we might have reasoned out the entire procedure—it follows simply and is the natural situation if you know the criminal. It wasn't necessary, however. Does that sound like an alibi for Ellery or myself? Hmph!" The old man barely smiled.

"When he sat down next to Field he had a carefully planned idea of his course of action. Don't forget that he was on a strict time-schedule and could not afford to waste a minute. On the other hand, Field, too, knew that Barry had to get back so he made no unnecessary delays. The truth of the matter, as Barry has told us, is that he expected to have a more difficult time with Field than he actually did have. But Field was sociably amenable to Barry's suggestions and conversation, probably because he was quite drunk and expected to receive a huge sum of money within a short time.

"Barry first requested the papers. When Field cannily asked for the money before he produced the documents, Barry showed him a wallet bulging with apparently genuine bills. It was quite dark in the theatre and Barry did not take the bills apart. Actually they were stage-money. He patted them suggestively and did what Field must have expected: refused to hand over the money until he had checked the documents. Bear in mind that Barry was an accomplished actor and could handle the difficult situation with the confidence imparted to him by his stage training. . . . Field reached under his seat and to Barry's utter astonishment and consternation produced his tophat. Barry says that Field remarked: 'Never thought I'd keep the papers in this, did you? As a matter of fact, I've dedicated this hat to your history quite exclusively. See—it has your name in it.' And with this astounding state-

ment he turned back the band! Barry used his pocket-pencil flashlight and saw his name inked in on the underside of the leather sweat-band.

"Just imagine what went through his mind at this moment. Here he saw what seemed at the moment a ruinous accident to his careful plans. Should Field's hat be examined—and of course it would be—at the time of the discovery of the body, then the name Stephen Barry on the band would be overwhelming evidence. . . . Barry had no time to rip out the band. In the first place he had no knife—unfortunately for him; and in the second place the hat-band was closely and securely stitched to the tough fabric. Working on split-time, he saw at once that the only course open to him was to take the hat away after he killed Field. Since he and Field were of the same general physique, with Field wearing an average-sized hat, 7 $\frac{1}{8}$, he immediately decided to leave the theatre wearing or carrying Field's hat. He would deposit his own in the dressing-room, where its presence was not out of the way, take Field's hat from the theatre with him and destroy it as soon as he reached his rooms. It also occurred to him that if the hat were by some chance examined as he was leaving the theatre, his name printed inside would certainly ward off suspicion. In all probability it was this fact that made Barry feel he was running into no particular danger, even though he had not foreseen the unexpected circumstance."

"Clever rogue," murmured Sampson.

"The quick brain, Henry, the quick brain," said Queen gravely. "It has run many a man's neck into the noose. . . . As he made the lightning decision to take the hat, he realized that he could not leave his own in its place. For one thing, his hat was a snap-down—an opera-hat—but more important, it had the name of Le Brun, the theatrical costumer, stamped in it. You can see that this

would immediately point to someone in the cast—just the thing he wished to avoid. He told me also that at the moment, and for quite some time thereafter, he felt that the most the police could deduce from the hat's being missing was that it was taken because it contained something valuable. He could not see how this investigatory guess would point the finger of suspicion anywhere near him. When I explained to him the series of deductions Ellery made from the mere fact that the tophat was missing, he was utterly astounded. . . . You can see, now, that the only really fundamental weakness of his crime was due not to an oversight or a mistake on his part, but to an occurrence which he could not possibly have foreseen. It forced his hand and the entire chain was started. Had Barry's name not been lettered in Field's hat, there is no question in my mind but that he would be a free and unsuspected man to-day. The police records would carry another unsolved murder on its pages.

"I need not state that this entire train of thought flashed through his brain in less time than it takes to describe. He saw what he had to do and his plans adjusted themselves instantly to the new development. . . . When Field extracted the papers from the hat, Barry examined them cursorily under the lawyer's watchful eye. He did this by the same pencil flashlight—a tiny streak of illumination quite obscured by their shielding bodies. The papers seemed in good order and complete. But Barry did not spend much time over the papers at the moment. He looked up with a rueful smile and said: 'Seem to be all here, damn you'—very naturally, as if they were enemies under a truce and he was being a good sport. Field interpreted the remark for what it was intended to convey. Barry dipped into his pocket—the light was out now—and, as if he were nervous, took a swig at a pocket-flask of good whisky. Then as if recollecting his manners,

he asked Field pleasantly enough if he would not take a drink to bind the bargain. Field, having seen Barry drink from the flask, could have no suspicion of foul play. In fact, he probably never dreamed that Barry would try to do him in. Barry handed him a flask. . . .

"But it wasn't the same flask. Under cover of the darkness he had taken out two flasks—the one he himself used coming from his left hip-pocket, the flask he gave Field coming from his right hip-pocket. In handing it over to Field, he merely switched flasks. It was very simple—and made simpler because of the darkness and the fuddled condition of the lawyer. . . . The ruse of the flask worked. But Barry had taken no chances. He had in his pocket a hypodermic filled with the poison. If Field had refused to drink Barry was prepared to plunge the needle into the lawyer's arm or leg. He possessed a hypodermic needle which a physician had procured for him many years before. Barry had suffered from nervous attacks and could not remain under a doctor's care since he was traveling from place to place with a stock company. The hypodermic was untraceable, therefore, on a cold trail years old; and he was ready if Field refused to drink. So you see—his plan, even in this particular, was fool-proof. . . .

"The flask from which Field drank contained good whiskey, all right, but mixed with tetra ethyl lead in a copious dose. The poison's slight ether smell was lost in the reek of the liquor; and Field, drinking, gulped down a huge mouthful before he realized that anything was wrong, if he did at all.

"Mechanically he returned the flask to Barry, who pocketed it and said: 'I guess I'll look over these papers more carefully—there's no reason why I should trust you, Field. . . .' Field, who was feeling extremely disinterested by this time, nodded in a puzzled sort of way and slumped

down in his seat. Barry really did examine the papers but he watched Field like a hawk out of the corner of his eye all the time. In about five minutes he saw that Field was out—out for good. He was not entirely unconscious but well under way; his face was contorted and he was gasping for breath. He seemed unable to make any violent muscular movement or outcry. Of course, he'd utterly forgotten Barry—in his agony—perhaps didn't remain conscious very long. When he groaned those few words to Pusak it was the superhuman effort of a practically dead man. . . .

"Barry now consulted his watch. It was 9:40. He had been with Field only ten minutes. He had to be back on the stage at 9:50. He decided to wait three minutes more—it had taken less time than he had figured—to make sure that Field would not raise a rumpus. At 9:43 exactly, with Field terribly inanimate in his internal agonies, Barry took Field's hat, snapped down his own and slipped it under his cloak, and rose. The way was clear. Hugging the wall, walking down the aisle as carefully and unobtrusively as possible, he gained the rear of the leftside boxes without anyone noticing him. The play was at its highest point of tension. All eyes were riveted on the stage.

"In the rear of the boxes he ripped off the false hair, rapidly adjusted his make-up and passed through the stage-door. The door leads into a narrow passageway which in turn leads into a corridor, branching out to various parts of the backstage area. His dressing-room is a few feet from the entrance to the corridor. He slipped inside, threw his stage-hat among his regular effects, dashed the remaining contents of the death-flask into the wash-bowl and cleaned out the flask. He emptied the contents of the hypodermic into the toilet drain and put away the needle, cleaned. If it was found—what of it? He had

a perfectly sound excuse for owning it and besides the murder had not been committed by such an instrument at all. . . . He was now ready for his cue, calm, debonair, a little bored. The call came at exactly 9:50, he went on the stage and was there until the hue-and-cry was raised at 9:55 in the orchestra. . . .”

“Talk about your complicated plots!” ejaculated Sampson.

“It is not so complicated as it seems at first hearing,” returned the Inspector. “Remember that Barry is an exceptionally clever young man and above all an excellent actor. No one *but* an accomplished actor could have carried off such a plan. The procedure was simple, after all; his hardest job was to keep to his time-schedule. If he was seen by any one he was disguised. The only dangerous part of his scheme was the getaway—when he walked down the aisle and went backstage through the box stagedoor. The aisle he took care of by keeping an eye out for the usher while he sat next to Field. He had known beforehand, of course, that the ushers, due to the nature of the play, kept their stations more or less faithfully, but he counted on his disguise and hypodermic to help him through any emergency that might arise. However, Madge O’Connell was lax in her duty and so even this was in his favor. He told me last night, not without a certain pride, that he had prepared for every contingency. . . . As for the stagedoor, he knew from experience that at that period in the play’s progress practically every one was on the stage. The technical men were busy at their stations, too. . . . Remember that he planned the crime knowing in advance the exact conditions under which he would have to operate. And if there was an element of danger, of uncertainty—well, it was all a risky business, wasn’t it?—he asked me last night, smiling; and I had to admire him for his philosophy if for nothing else.”

The Inspector shifted restlessly. "This makes clear, I hope, just how Barry did the job. As for our investigation. . . . With the hat-deductions made and our knowledge of the murderer's identity, we still had no inkling of the exact circumstances behind the crime. If you've been keeping in mind the material evidence which we had collected by Thursday night, you will see that we had nothing at all with which to work. The best thing we could hope for was that somewhere among the papers for which all of us were looking was a clue which would tie up to Barry. Even that would not be enough, but. . . . So the next step," said the Inspector, after a sigh, "was the discovery of the papers in Field's neat hiding-place at the top of the bed-canopy in his apartment. This was Ellery's work from start to finish. We had found out that Field had no safety-deposit box, no post-office box, no outside residence, no friendly neighbor or tradesman, and that the documents were not in his office. By a process of elimination Ellery insisted that they must be somewhere in Field's rooms. You know how this search ended—an ingenious bit of pure reasoning on Ellery's part. We found Morgan's papers; we found Cronin's stuff relating to the gang activities—and by the way, Tim, I'm going to be keenly alive to what happens when we start on the big clean-up—and we found finally a wad of miscellaneous papers. Among these were Michaels' and Barry's. . . . You'll remember, Tim, that Ellery, from the handwriting analysis business, deduced that possibly we would find the originals of Barry's papers—and so we did.

"Michaels' case was interesting. That time he went to Elmira on the 'petty larceny' charge, it was through Field's clever manipulations with the law. But Field had the goods on Michaels and filed the documentary evidence of the man's real guilt away in his favorite hiding-place, in the event that he might wish to use it at some future

date. A very saving person, this Field. . . . When Michaels was released from prison Field used him unscrupulously for his dirty work, holding the threat of those papers over the man's head.

"Now Michaels had been on the lookout for a long time. He wanted the papers badly, as you may imagine. At every opportunity he searched the apartment for them. And when he didn't find them time after time, he became desperate. I don't doubt that Field, in his devilishly sardonic way, enjoyed the knowledge that Michaels was ransacking the place day after day. . . . On Monday night Michaels did what he said he did—went home and to bed. But early Tuesday morning, when he read the papers and learned that Field had been killed, he realized that the jig was up. He had to make one last search for the papers—if he didn't find them, the police might and he would be in hot water. So he risked running into the police net when he returned to Field's rooms Tuesday morning. The story about the check was nonsense, of course.

"But let's get on to Barry. The original papers we found in the hat marked 'Miscellaneous' told a sordid story. Stephen Barry, to make it short and ugly, has a strain of negroid blood in his veins. He was born in the South of a poor family and there was definite documentary evidence—letters, birth-records and the like—to prove that his blood had the black taint. Now Field, as you know, made it his business to run things like this to earth. In some way he got hold of the papers, how long ago we can't say, but certainly quite a while back. He looked up Barry's status at the time and found him to be a struggling actor, on his uppers more often than he was in funds. He decided to let the fellow alone for the time. If ever Barry came into money or in the limelight, there would be time enough to blackmail him. . . . Field's wildest dreams could not have foreseen Barry's engagement to Frances

Ives-Pope, daughter of a multi-millionaire and blue-blood society girl. I needn't explain what it would have meant to Barry to have the story of his mixed blood become known to the Ives-Popes. Besides—and this is quite important—Barry was in a constant state of impoverishment due to his gambling. What money he earned went into the pockets of the bookmakers at the race-track and in addition he had contracted enormous debts which he could never have wiped out unless his marriage to Frances went through. So pressing was his need, in fact, that it was he who subtly urged an early marriage. I have been wondering just how he regarded Frances sentimentally. I don't think, in all fairness to him, that he was marrying wholly because of the money involved. He really loves her, I suppose—but then, who wouldn't?"

The old man smiled reminiscently and went on. "Field approached Barry some time ago with the papers—secretly, of course. Barry paid what he could, but it was woefully little and naturally did not satisfy the insatiable black-mailer. He kept putting Field off desperately. But Field himself was getting into hot water because of his own gambling and was 'calling in' his little business deals one by one. Barry, pushed to the wall, realized that unless Field were silenced everything would be lost. He planned the murder. He saw that even if he did manage to raise the \$50,000 Field demanded—a palpable impossibility—and even if he did get the original papers, yet Field might still wreck his hopes by merely circulating the story. There was only one thing to do—kill Field. He did it."

"Black blood, eh?" murmured Cronin. "Poor devil."

"You would scarcely guess it from his appearance," remarked Sampson. "He looks as white as you or I."

"Barry isn't anywhere near a full-blooded negro," protested the Inspector. "He has just a drop in his veins—just a drop, but it would have been more than enough for

the Ives-Popes. . . . To get on. When the papers had been discovered and read—we knew everything. Who—how—why the crime was committed. So we took stock of our evidence to bring about a conviction. You can't hale a man into court on a murder charge without evidence. . . . Well, what do you think we had? Nothing!

"Let me discuss the clues which might have been useful as evidence. The lady's purse—that was out. Valueless, as you know. . . . The source of the poison—a total failure. Incidentally, Barry did procure it exactly as Dr. Jones suggested—Jones, the toxicologist. Barry bought ordinary gasoline and distilled the tetra ethyl lead from it. There was no trace left. . . . Another possible clue—Monte Field's hat. It was gone. . . . The extra tickets for the six vacant seats—we had never seen them and there seemed little chance that we ever would. . . . The only other material evidence—the papers—indicated motive but proved nothing. By this token Morgan might have committed the crime, or any member of Field's criminal organization.

"Our only hope for bringing about a conviction depended upon our scheme to have Barry's apartment burglarized in the hope that either the hat, or the tickets, or some other clue like the poison or the poison-apparatus, would be found. Velie got me a professional housebreaker and Barry's apartment was rifled Friday night while he was acting his rôle in the theatre. Not a trace of any of these clues came to light. The hat, the tickets, the poison—everything had been destroyed. Obviously, Barry would have done that; we could only make sure.

"In desperation, I called a meeting of a number of the Monday night audience, hoping that I would find someone who remembered seeing Barry that night. Sometimes, you know, people recall events later which they forgot completely in the excitement of a previous quizzing. But

this too, as it happened, was a failure. The only thing of value that turned up was the orangeade boy's testimony about seeing Field pick up an evening bag in the alley. This got us nowhere as far as Barry was concerned, however. And remember that when we questioned the cast Thursday night we got no direct evidence from them.

"So there we were with a beautifully hypothetical statement of facts for a jury, but not a shred of genuine evidence. The case we had to present would have offered no difficulties to a shrewd defending attorney. It was all circumstantial evidence, based chiefly on reasoning. You know as well as I do what a chance such a case would have in court. . . . Then my troubles really began, for Ellery had to leave town.

"I racked my brains—the few I have." Queen scowled at his empty coffee-cup. "Things looked black enough. How could I convict a man without evidence? It was maddening. And then Ellery did me the final service of wiring me a suggestion."

"A suggestion?" asked Cronin.

"A suggestion that I do a little blackmailing myself. . . ."

"Blackmailing yourself?" Sampson stared. "I don't see the point."

"Trust Ellery to make a point that on the surface is obscure," retorted the Inspector. "I saw at once that the only course left open to me was to *manufacture* evidence!"

Both men frowned in puzzlement.

"It's simple enough," said Queen. "Field was killed by an unusual poison. And Field was killed because he was blackmailing Barry. Wasn't it fair for me to assume that if Barry were suddenly blackmailed on the identical score, he would again use poison—and in all likelihood the *same* poison? I don't have to tell you that 'Once a poisoner

always a poisoner.' In the case of Barry, if I could only get him to try to use that tetra ethyl lead on somebody else, I'd have him! The poison is almost unknown—but I needn't explain further. You can see that if I caught him with tetra ethyl lead, that would be all the evidence I needed.

"How to accomplish the feat was another matter. . . . The blackmail opportunity fitted the circumstances perfectly. I actually had the original papers pertaining to Barry's parentage and tainted blood. Barry thought these destroyed—he had no reason to suspect that the papers he took from Field were clever forgeries. If I blackmailed him he was in the same boat as before. Consequently he would have to take the same action.

"And so I used our friend Charley Michaels. The only reason I utilized him was that to Barry it would seem logical that Michaels, Field's crony and bully and constant companion, should be in possession of the original papers. I got Michaels to write a letter, dictated by me. The reason I wanted Michaels to write it was that possibly Barry, through association with Field, was familiar with the man's handwriting. This may seem a small point but I couldn't take any chances. If I slipped up on my ruse, Barry would see through it at once and I'd never get him again.

"I enclosed a sheet of the original papers in the letter, to show that the new blackmailing threat had teeth. I stated that Field had brought Barry copies—the sheet enclosed proved my statement. Barry had no reason in the world to doubt that Michaels was milking him as his master had done before. The letter was so worded as to be an ultimatum. I set the time and the place and, to make a long story short, the plan worked. . . .

"I guess that's all, gentlemen. Barry came, he had his trusty little hypodermic filled with tetra ethyl lead, also a

flask—an exact replica, you see, of the Field crime except for locale. My man—it was Ritter—was instructed to take no chances. As soon as he recognized Barry he covered him and raised the alarm. Luckily we were almost at their elbows behind the bushes. Barry was desperate and would have killed himself and Ritter, too, if he'd had half a chance."

There was a significant silence as the Inspector finished, sighed, leaned forward and took some snuff.

Sampson shifted in his chair. "Listens like a thriller, Q," he said admiringly. "But I'm not clear on a few points. For example, if this tetra ethyl lead is so little known, how on earth did Barry ever find out about it—to the degree of actually making some himself?"

"Oh." The Inspector smiled. "That worried me from the moment Jones described the poison. I was in the dark even after the capture. And yet—it just goes to show how stupid I am—the answer was under my nose all the time. You will remember that at the Ives-Pope place a certain Dr. Cornish was introduced. Now Cornish is a personal friend of the old financier and both of them are interested in medical science. In fact, I recall Ellery's asking at one time: 'Didn't Ives-Pope recently donate \$100,000 to the Chemical Research Foundation?' That was true. It was on the occasion of a meeting in the Ives-Pope house one evening several months ago that Barry accidentally found out about tetra ethyl lead. A delegation of scientists had called upon the magnate, introduced by Cornish, to request his financial aid in the Foundation. In the course of the evening, the talk naturally turned to medical gossip and the latest scientific discoveries. Barry admitted that he overheard one of the directors of the Foundation, a famous toxicologist, relate to the group the story of the poison. At this time Barry had no idea that he would put the knowledge to use; when he decided to

kill Field, he saw the advantages of the poison and its untraceable source immediately."

"What the deuce was the significance of that message you sent to me by Louis Panzer Thursday morning, Inspector?" inquired Cronin curiously. "Remember? Your note requested that I watch Lewin and Panzer when they met to see if they knew each other. As I reported to you, I asked Lewin later and he denied any acquaintance with Panzer. What was the idea?"

"Panzer," repeated the Inspector softly. "Panzer has always intrigued me, Tim. At the time I sent him to you, remember the hat deductions which absolved him had not yet been made. . . . I sent him to you merely out of a sense of curiosity. I thought that if Lewin recognized him, it might point to a connection between Panzer and Field. My thought was not borne out; it wasn't too hopeful to begin with. Panzer might have been acquainted with Field on the outside without Lewin's knowledge. On the other hand, I didn't particularly want Panzer hanging around the theatre that morning; so the errand did both of us a lot of good."

"Well, I hope you were satisfied with that package of newspapers I sent you in return, as you instructed," grinned Cronin.

"How about the anonymous letter Morgan received? Was that a blind, or what?" demanded Sampson.

"It was a sweet little frame-up," returned Queen grimly. "Barry explained that to me last night. He had heard of Morgan's threat against Field's life. He didn't know, of course, that Field was blackmailing Morgan. But he thought it might plant a strong false trail if he got Morgan to the theatre on a thin story Monday night. If Morgan didn't come, there was nothing lost. If he did— He worked it this way. He chose ordinary cheap notepaper, went down to one of the typewriter agencies and, wearing

gloves, typed the letter, signed it with that useless scrawled initial, and mailed the thing from the general post-office. He was careful about fingerprints and certainly the note could never be traced to him. As luck would have it, Morgan swallowed the bait and came. The very ridiculousness of Morgan's story and the obvious falsity of the note, as Barry figured, made Morgan a strong suspect. On the other hand, Providence seems to provide compensations. For the information we got from Morgan about Field's blackmailing activities did Mr. Barry a heap of harm. He couldn't have foreseen that, though."

Sampson nodded. "I can think of only one other thing. How did Barry arrange for the purchase of the tickets—or did he arrange for it at all?"

"He certainly did. Barry convinced Field that as a matter of fairness to himself, the meeting and the transfer of papers should take place in the theatre under a cloak of absolute secrecy. Field was agreeable and was easily persuaded to purchase the eight tickets at the box-office. He himself realized that the six extra tickets were needed to insure privacy. He sent Barry seven and Barry promptly destroyed them all except LL30 Left."

The Inspector rose, smiling tiredly. "Djuna!" he said in a low voice. "Some more coffee."

Sampson stopped the boy with a protesting hand. "Thanks, Q, but I've got to be going. Cronin and I have loads of work on this gang affair. I couldn't rest, though, until I got the whole story from your own lips. . . . Q, old man," he added awkwardly, "I'm really sincere when I say that I think you've done a remarkable piece of work."

"I never heard of anything like it," put in Cronin heartily. "What a riddle, and what a beautiful piece of clear reasoning, from beginning to end!"

"Do you really think so?" asked the Inspector quietly. "I'm so glad, gentlemen. Because all the credit rightfully

belongs to Ellery. I'm rather proud of that boy of mine. . . ."

.

When Sampson and Cronin had departed and Djuna had retired to his tiny kitchen to wash the breakfast dishes, the Inspector turned to his writing-desk and took up his fountain-pen. He rapidly read over what he had written to his son. Sighing, he put pen to paper once more.

Let's forget what I just wrote. More than an hour has passed since then. Sampson and Tim Cronin came up and I had to crystallize our work on the case for their benefit. I never saw such a pair! Kids, both of 'em. Gobbled the story as if it were a fairy-tale. . . . As I talked, I saw with appalling clarity how little I actually did and how much you did. I'm pining for the day when you will pick out some nice girl and be married, and then the whole darned Queen family can pack off to Italy and settle down to a life of peace. . . . Well, El, I've got to dress and go down to headquarters. A lot of routine work has collected since last Monday and my job is just about cut out for me. . . .

When are you coming home? Don't think I want to rush you, but it's so gosh-awful lonesome, son. I— No, I guess I'm selfish as well as tired. Just a doddering old fogey who needs coddling. But you *will* come home soon, won't you? Djuna sends his regards. The rascal is taking my ears off with the dishes in the kitchen.

Your loving

FATHER

THE END

THE FRENCH POWDER MYSTERY

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SOME PERSONS OF IMPORTANCE

ENCOUNTERED IN THE COURSE OF THE FRENCH INVESTIGATION *

NOTE: A list of the personalities involved in *The French Powder Mystery* is here set at the disposition of the reader. He is urged indeed to con the list painstakingly before attacking the story proper, so that each name will be vigorously impressed upon his consciousness; moreover, to refer often to this page during his perusal of the story. . . . Bear in mind that the most piercing enjoyment deriving from indulgence in detectival fiction arises from the battle of wits between author and reader. Scrupulous attention to the cast of characters is frequently a means to this eminently desirable end.

ELLERY QUEEN.

WINIFRED MARCHBANKS FRENCH, *Requiescat in pace*. What cesspool of evil lies beneath her murder?

BERNICE CARMODY, a child of ill-fortune.

CYRUS FRENCH, a common American atavar—merchant prince and Puritan.

MARION FRENCH, a silken Cinderella?

WESTLEY WEAVER, amanuensis and lover—and friend to the author.

VINCENT CARMODY, *l'homme sombre et malheureux*. A dealer in antiquities.

JOHN GRAY, director. A donor of book-ends.

* The success of this device in his recent novel (*The Roman Hat Mystery*) has encouraged Mr. Queen to repeat it here. It was found useful by many of Mr. Queen's readers in keeping the *dramatis personæ* compactly before them.—THE EDITOR.

HUBERT MARCHBANKS, director. Ursine brother to the late Mrs. French.

A. MELVILLE TRASK, director. Sycophantic blot on a fair 'scutcheon.

CORNELIUS ZORN, director. An Antwerpian nabob, potbelly, inhibitions and all.

MRS. CORNELIUS ZORN, Zorn's Medusa-wife.

PAUL LAVERY, the impeccable *français*. Pioneer in modern art-decoration. Author of technical studies in the field of fine arts, notably *L'Art de Faïence, publi par Monserat, Paris, 1913*.

ARNOLD MACKENZIE, General Manager of French's, a Scot.

WILLIAM CROUTHER, chief guardian of the law employed by French's.

DIANA JOHNSON, a study in normal ebon.

JAMES SPRINGER, Manager of the Book Department; a mysterioso.

PETER O'FLAHERTY, leal head nightwatchman of the French establishment.

HERMANN RALSKA, GEORGE POWERS, BERT BLOOM, nightwatchmen.

HORTENSE UNDERHILL, genus *housekeeper tyranna*.

DORIS KEATON, a maidenly minion.

THE HON. SCOTT WELLES, just a Commissioner of Police.

DR. SAMUEL PROUTY, Assistant Medical Examiner of New York County.

HENRY SAMPSON, District Attorney of New York County.

TIMOTHY CRONIN, Assistant District Attorney of New York County.

THOMAS VELIE, Detective-Sergeant under the wing of Inspector Queen.

HAGSTROM, HESSE, FLINT, RITTER, JOHNSON, PIGGOTT, sleuths attached to the command of Inspector Queen.

SALVATORE FIORELLI, Head of the Narcotic Squad.

"JIMMY," Headquarters fingerprint expert who has ever remained last-nameless.

DJUNA, The Queens' beloved scull, who appears far too little.

Detectives, policemen, clerks, a physician, a nurse, a Negro caretaker, a freight watchman, etc., etc., etc., etc.

and

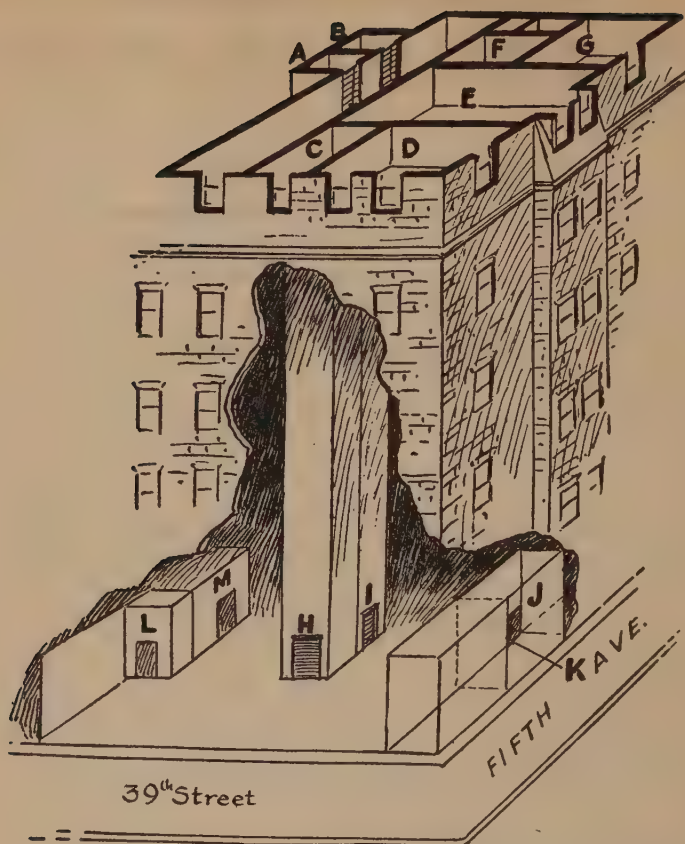
INSPECTOR RICHARD QUEEN

who, being not himself, is sorely beset in this adventure

and

ELLERY QUEEN

who is so fortunate as to resolve it.



A—Elevator shaft
 B—Stairway shaft
 C, D, E, F, G—French apartment
 C—Lavatory F—Anteroom
 D—Bedroom G—Cardroom
 E—Library
 H—Ground floor door to elevator, facing 39th Street corridor

I—Ground floor door to stairway, facing Fifth Avenue corridor
 J—Window containing Lavery Exhibition
 K—Door to murder-window
 L—O'Flaherty's office, with view of 39th Street entrance
 M—Door from freight room

FOREWORD

EDITOR'S NOTE: It will be recalled by the readers of Mr. Queen's last detective novel * that a foreword appeared therein written by a gentleman designating himself as *J. J. McC.* The publishers did not then, nor do they now, know the identity of this friend of the two Queens. In deference to the author's wish, however, Mr. McC. has been kind enough to pen once more a prefatory note to his friend's new novel, and this note appears below.

I have followed the fortunes of the Queens, father and son, with more than casual interest for many years. Longer perhaps than any other of their legion friends. Which places me, or so Ellery avers, in the unfortunate position of Chorus, that quaint herald of the olden drama who craves the auditor's sympathetic ear and receives at best his willful impatience.

It is with pleasure nevertheless that I once more enact my rôle of prologue-master in a modern tale of murder and detection. This pleasure derives from two causes: the warm reception accorded Mr. Queen's first novel, for the publication of which I was more or less responsible, under his *nom de plume*; and the long and sometimes arduous friendship I have enjoyed with the Queens.

I say "arduous" because the task of a mere mortal in attempting to keep step with the busy life of a New York detective Inspector and the intellectual activity of a book-worm and logician can adequately be described only by that word. Richard Queen, whom I knew intimately

* *The Roman Hat Mystery*, by Ellery Queen; published by Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1929.

long before he retired, a veteran of thirty-two years' service in the New York police department, was a dynamic little gray man, a bundle of energy and industry. He knew his crime, he knew his criminals, and he knew his law. He brought to these not uncommon attributes, however, a daring of method that put him far above the average detective Inspector. A firm advocate of the more inspirational methods of his son, he nevertheless was the practical policeman to his fingertips. Under his long régime the Detective Bureau, except for those stormy times when his official superiors took it upon themselves by overhauling the department to satisfy a theory or a press opinion, garnered a record of solved capital crimes which to this day is unique in the police history of New York City.

Ellery Queen, as may be imagined, deplored the more unimaginative aspects of his father's profession. He was the pure logician, with a generous dash of dreamer and artist thrown in—a lethal combination to those felons who were so unfortunate as to be dissected by the keen instruments of his mind, always under those questing pince-nez eyeglasses. His "life work" before his father's retirement was hardly visible to the eye, unless his casual custom of writing a detective story when the spirit moved him may be termed a life work.* He occupied himself chiefly in a student's pursuit of culture and knowledge, and since he had an independent income from a maternal uncle which removed him from the class of social parasite, he lived what he characteristically termed the "ideal intellectual life." It was natural for him to evince intense interest in crime, due

* It is interesting to note that "Ellery Queen" published many detective novels during his father's Inspectorship, but under his real name, which is of course not Queen. These unrevealed stories, however, should not be confused with the stories published under the name of Ellery Queen, of which *The French Powder Mystery* is the second. These latter are taken practically untouched from actual investigations undertaken by the author and his father; which accounts both for the *nom de plume* and the secrecy shrouding the identity of the Queens.

to his environment, which from childhood had been saturated with tales of murder and law-breaking; but the artistic element in his nature made him useless for routine police investigation.

I recall vividly a conversation between father and son one day many years ago which brought out their wholly opposed viewpoints on the subject of crime-detection. I relate the conversation here because it will crystallize the difference between the two men so clearly—a point quite essential to complete understanding of the Queens.

The Inspector was expounding on his profession for my benefit, while Ellery lounged in his chair between us.

"Ordinary crime-detection," said the old man, "is almost wholly a mechanical matter. Most crimes are committed by 'criminals'—that is to say, by individuals habituated by environment and repetitious conduct to the pursuit of law-breaking. Such persons in ninety-nine out of a hundred cases have police records.

"The detective in these ninety-nine hypothetical cases has much to go on. Bertillon measurements—fingerprint records, intimate photographs, a complete dossier. Moreover, he has a little file of the criminal's idiosyncrasies. We have not developed this phase of detective science so well as the London, Vienna and Berlin police, but we have at least laid a foundation. . . .

"A burglar who habitually makes use of a certain method of prying open doors and windows, or blowing safes, for example; a hold-up man who always wears a crude, home-made mask; a gunman who smokes and drops a certain brand of cigaret, purely from habit; a gangster with an inordinate fondness for women; a second-story man who always works alone, or one who invariably employs a 'look-out' . . . These idiosyncrasies of method are sometimes as definite clues to the identity of a criminal as his fingerprints.

"It seems peculiar to the layman," went on Inspector Queen, when he had inhaled deeply from his old snuff-box—a habit inseparable from the man—"that a criminal should constantly use the same *modus operandi*—always drop the same cigarette smoked the same way; always wear the same kind of mask; always indulge in a wild orgy with women after a 'job.' But they forget that crime is the criminal's business, and that every business leaves its indelible mark of habit on the business man."

"Your psychological policeman, by the way," grinned Ellery, "doesn't scorn the aid of informers, either, McC. Something like the little tick-bird that sits on the rhino's back and warns of approaching danger. . . ."

"I was coming to that," retorted his father equably. "As I said in the beginning, we have plenty to go on in the case of the hardened criminal. But most of all, despite my son's jeering attitude, we have come to depend upon the underworld's 'squealers,' 'stool-pigeons'—they're called less polite names, too—for the solution of routine crimes. It is an open secret that without the stool-pigeon a huge percentage of felonies would remain unsolved. They are as essential to the big city's police as a knowledge of the proper source-book is to the lawyer. It stands to reason—the underworld by its amazing grapevine inevitably knows who has pulled a big 'job.' Our problem is to find a 'stoolie' who will part with the tip for a fair consideration. It isn't always easy even then, by the way. . . ."

"Child's play," said Ellery in a provocative tone. And he grinned.

"I firmly believe," went on the old Inspector imperturbably, "that every police department in the world would collapse in six months if the institution of underworld informing were to come to an end."

Ellery lazily took up the cudgels. "Most of what you say, Sire, is only too true. Which is why ninety per cent

of your investigations hold not a vestige of glamour for me. But the last ten per cent!

"Where the police detective woefully falls down, J.J.," he said smiling, turning to me, "is in the case of the crime whose perpetrator is *not* a habitual criminal, who has therefore left *no* handy fingerprints which will correspond with another set in your files, about whose idiosyncrasies *nothing* is known for the ludicrously simple reason that he has never been a criminal before. Such a person, generally speaking, is not of the underworld, and you can therefore pump your stool-pigeon to your heart's delight without eliciting the slightest morsel of useful information.

"You have nothing to go on, I am happy to say," he continued, twirling his pince-nez, "except the crime itself, and such clues and pertinences as that crime reveals upon observation and investigation. Obviously—and I say this with proper respect for my father's ancient profession—obviously to nab the criminal in such a case is the more difficult job by many headaches. Which explains two things—the hideously high percentage of unsolved crimes in this country, and my own absorbing avocation."

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The French Powder Mystery is one of the older cases from the Queens' files—an actual case, as I have said, and one in which Ellery exhibited scintillating proofs of his unique talents. He kept notes of this case during the French investigation—one of his few practical habits. Subsequently, with the unmasking of the murderer, he wrote a book around the real-life plot, developing and embroidering the facts to fit a literary pattern.

I induced him to polish up the manuscript and have it published as the second novel under his pen-name—and this at a time when I was under his sacred roof in the Queens' Italian villa. For it will be recalled that Ellery,

having renounced his old profession utterly, now that he is married and domesticated, has hidden his old cases in the depths of a filing-cabinet and nothing less than the detonation of a presumptuous friend's exhortations has been able to make him consent to a revivication of the mellowed manuscripts.

It should be borne in mind, in all fairness to Inspector Queen, that the old sleuth's comparatively small rôle in the French case was due to the enormous press of official business during that hectic season, and in no small degree to the heckling he was subjected to by the newly appointed civilian, Scott Welles, to the post of Commissioner of Police.

In closing, it might be pleasant to point out that the Queens are at this writing still in their tiny mountain-home in Italy; that Ellery's son has learned to toddle and say with innocent gravity, "gramps"; that Djuna is in perfect health and has recently undergone the stress of a cosmic love-affair with a little witch of a country girl; that the Inspector is still writing monographs for German magazines and making occasional tours of inspection through the Continental police departments; that Mrs. Ellery Queen has happily recovered from her recent illness; and finally that Ellery himself, after his visit last fall to New York, has returned to that "gem-encrusted" Roman scenery with gratitude in his heart and, he says, (but I doubt it), no regrets for the distractions of the West Side.

Which leaves me little else to write but a most sincere hope that you will enjoy the reading of *The French Powder Mystery* fully as much as I did.

J. J. McC.

NEW YORK
June, 1930

THE FIRST EPISODE

"Parenthetically speaking . . . in numerous cases the sole difference between success and failure in the detection of crime is a sort of . . . osmotic reluctance (on the part of the detective's mental perceptions) to seep through the cilia of WHAT SEEMS TO BE and reach the vital stream of WHAT ACTUALLY IS."

—FROM A PRESCRIPTION FOR CRIME,
By Dr. Luigi Pinna

"THE QUEENS WERE IN THE PARLOR"

THEY sat about the old walnut table in the Queen apartment—five oddly assorted individuals. There was District Attorney Henry Sampson, a slender man with bright eyes. Beside Sampson glowered Salvatore Fiorelli, head of the Narcotic Squad, a burly Italian with a long black scar on his right cheek. Red-haired Timothy Cronin, Sampson's assistant, was there. And Inspector Richard Queen and Ellery Queen sat shoulder to shoulder with vastly differing facial expressions. The old man sulked, bit the end of his mustache. Ellery stared vacantly at Fiorelli's cicatrix.

The calendar on the desk nearby read Tuesday, May the twenty-fourth, 19—. A mild spring breeze fluttered the window draperies.

The Inspector glared about the board. "What did Welles ever do? I'd like to know, Henry!"

"Come now, Q, Scott Welles isn't a bad scout."

"Rides to hounds, shoots a 91 on the course, and that makes him eligible for the police commissionership, doesn't it? Of course, of course! And the unnecessary work he piles on us. . . ."

"It isn't so bad as that," said Sampson. "He's done some useful things, in all fairness. Flood Relief Committee, social work. . . . A man who has been so active in non-political fields can't be a total loss, Q."

The Inspector snorted. "How long has he been in office? No, don't tell me—let me guess. Two days. . . . Well, here's what he's done to us in two days. Get your teeth into this.

"Number one—reorganized the Missing Persons Bureau.

And why poor Parsons got the gate I don't know. . . . Number two—scrambled seven precinct captains so thoroughly that they need road maps to get back to familiar territory. Why? You tell me. . . . Number three—shifted the make-up of Traffic B, C, and D. Number four—reduced a square two dozen second-grade detectives to pounding beats. Any reason? Certainly! Somebody whose grand-uncle's niece knows the Governor's fourth secretary is out for blood. . . . Number five—raked over the Police School and changed the rules. And I know he has his eagle eye on my pet Homicide Squad. . . .”

“You'll burst a blood-vessel,” said Cronin.

“You haven't heard anything yet,” said the Inspector grimly. “Every first-grade detective must now make out a daily report—in line of duty, mind you—a daily personal report direct to the Commissioner's office!”

“Well,” grinned Cronin, “he's welcome to read 'em all. Half those babies can't *spell* homicide.”

“Read them nothing, Tim. Do you think he'd waste *his* time? Not by your Aunt Martha. No, sir! He sends them into *my* office by his shiny little secretary, Theodore B. B. St. Johns, with a polite message: ‘The Commissioner's respects to Inspector Richard Queen, and the Commissioner would be obliged for an opinion within the hour on the veracity of the attached reports.’ And there I am, sweating marbles to keep my head clear for this narcotic investigation—there I am putting my mark on a flock of flatfoot reports.” The Inspector dug viciously into his snuff-box.

“You ain't spilled half of it, Queen,” growled Fiorelli. “What's this wall-eyed walrus, this pussy-footing specimen of a ‘civvie’ do but sneak in on my department, sniff around among the boys, hook a can of opium on the sly, and send it down to Jimmy for—guess what—fingerprints! Fingerprints, by God! As if Jimmy could find the print of a dope-peddler after a dozen of the gang had had their paws

on the can. Besides, we had the prints already! But no, he didn't stop for explanations. And then Stern searched high and low for the can and came runnin' to me with some crazy story that the guy we're lookin' for'd walked himself straight into Headquarters and snitched a pot of opium!" Fiorelli spread his huge hands mutely, stuck a stunted black cheroot into his mouth.

It was at this moment that Ellery picked up a little volume with torn covers from the table and began to read.

Sampson's grin faded. "All joking aside, though, if we don't gain ground soon on the drug ring we'll all be in a mess. Welles shouldn't have forced our hand and stirred up the White test case now. Looks as if this gang—" He shook his head dubiously.

"That's what riles me," complained the Inspector. "Here I am, just getting the feel of Pete Slavin's mob, and I have to spend a whole day down in Court testifying."

There was silence, broken after a moment by Cronin. "How did you come out on O'Shaughnessy in the Kingsley Arms murder?" he asked curiously. "Has he come clean?"

"Last night," said the Inspector. "We had to sweat him a little, but he saw we had the goods on him and came through." The harsh lines around his mouth softened. "Nice piece of work Ellery did there. When you stop to think that we were on the case a whole day without a glimmer of proof that O'Shaughnessy killed Herrin, although we were sure he'd done it—along comes my son, spends ten minutes on the scene, and comes out with enough proof to burn the murderer."

"Another miracle, eh?" chuckled Sampson. "What's the inside story, Q?" They glanced toward Ellery, but he was hunched in his chair, assiduously reading.

"As simple as rolling off a log," said Queen proudly. "It generally is when he explains it.—Djuna, more coffee, will you, son?"

An agile little figure popped out of the kitchenette, grinned, bobbed his dark head, and disappeared. Djuna was Inspector Queen's valet, man-of-all-work, cook, chambermaid, and unofficially the mascot of the Detective Bureau.* He emerged with a percolator and refilled the cups on the table. Ellery grasped his with a questioning hand and began to sip, his eyes riveted on the book.

"Simple's hardly the word," resumed the Inspector. "Jimmy had sprinkled that whole room with fingerprint powder and found nothing but Herrin's own prints—and Herrin was deader than a mackerel. The boys all took a whack at suggesting different places to sprinkle—it was quite a game while it lasted. . . ." He slapped the table. "Then Ellery marched in. I reviewed the case for him and showed him what we'd found. You remember we spotted Herrin's footprints in the crumbled plaster on the dining-room floor. We were mighty puzzled about that, because from the circumstances of the crime it was impossible for Herrin to have been in that dining-room. And that's where superior mentality, I suppose you'd call it, turned the trick. Ellery said: 'Are you certain those are Herrin's footprints?' I told him they were, beyond a doubt. When I told him why, he agreed—yet it was impossible for Herrin to have been in that room. And there lay the prints, giving us the lie. 'Very well,' says this precious son o' mine, 'maybe he wasn't in the room, after all.' 'But Ellery—the prints!' I objected. 'I have a notion,' he says, and goes into the bedroom.

"Well," sighed the Inspector, "he certainly did have a notion. In the bedroom he looked over the shoes on Herrin's dead feet, took them off, got some of the print powder from Jimmy, called for the copy of O'Shaughnessy's fingerprints, sprinkled the shoes—and sure enough, there was a beautiful thumb impression! He matched it

* See "*The Roman Hat Mystery*."

with the file print, and it proved to be O'Shaughnessy's. . . . You see, we'd looked in every place in that apartment for fingerprints except the one place where they were—on the dead body itself. Who'd ever think of looking for the murderer's sign on his victim's shoes?"

"Unlikely place," grunted the Italian. "How'd it figure?"

"Ellery reasoned that if Herrin wasn't in that room and his shoes were, it simply meant that somebody else wore or planted Herrin's shoes there. Infantile, isn't it? But it had to be thought of." The old man bore down on Ellery's bowed head with unconvincing irritability. "Ellery, what on earth are you reading? You're hardly an attentive host, son."

"That's one time a layman's familiarity with fingerprints came in handy," grinned Sampson.

"Ellery!"

Ellery looked up excitedly. He waved his book in triumph, and began to recite to the amazed group at the table: "'If they went to sleep with the sandals on, the thong worked into the feet and the sandals were frozen fast to them. This was partly due to the fact that, since their old sandals had failed, they wore untanned brogans made of newly flayed ox-hides.' * Do you know, dad, that gives me a splendid idea?" His face beamed as he reached for a pencil.

Inspector Queen swung to his feet, grumbling. "You can't get anything out of him when he's in that mood. . . . Come along, Henry—you going, Fiorelli?—let's get down to City Hall."

*I had been brushing up on my Xenophon, and when I ran across the passage relating to the Retreat of the Ten Thousand through ancient Armenia, the shoe reference gave me an idea for a short story. The incident is ridiculous in retrospect, although at the time I was quite oblivious to its humor.—E. Q.

"THE KINGS WERE IN THE COUNTING-HOUSE"

It was eleven o'clock when Inspector Queen left his apartment on West 87th Street in the company of Sampson, Cronin and Fiorelli, bound for the Criminal Courts Building.

At precisely the same moment, some miles to the south, a man stood quietly at the library dormer-window of a private apartment. The apartment was situated on the sixth floor of French's, the Fifth Avenue department store. The man at the window was Cyrus French, chief stockholder of French's and president of its Board of Directors.

French was watching the swirling traffic at the intersection of Fifth Avenue and 39th Street with unseeing eyes. He was a dour-visaged man of sixty-five, stocky, corpulent, iron-grey. He was dressed in a dark business suit. A white flower gleamed on his lapel.

He said: "I hope you made it clear that the meeting was for this morning at eleven, Westley," and turned sharply to eye a man seated beside a glass-topped desk before the window.

Westley Weaver nodded. He was a fresh-faced young man, clean-shaven and alert, in the early thirties.

"Quite clear," he replied pleasantly. He looked up from a stenographic notebook in which he had been writing. "As a matter of fact, here is a carbon copy of the memorandum I typed yesterday afternoon. I left one copy for each director, besides this one which you found on the desk this morning." He indicated a slip of blue-tinted paper lying beside the desk telephone. Except for five books standing between cylindrical onyx book-ends at the extreme right of the desk, a telephone, and the memorandum, the glass top was bare. "I followed up the

memos to the directors with telephone calls about a half-hour ago. They all promised to be here on time."

French grunted and turned again to look down upon the maze of morning traffic. Hands clasped behind his back, he began to dictate store business in his slightly grating voice.

They were interrupted five minutes later by a knock on the outer door, beyond an anteroom. French irritably called, "Come!" and there was the sound of a hand fumbling with the invisible knob. French said, "Oh, yes, the door's shut, of course; open it, Westley."

Weaver went quickly through the anteroom and flung open the heavy door. He admitted a weazened little old man who showed pale gums in a grin, and with an amazing celerity for a man of his years tripped into the room.

"Never seem to remember that locked door of yours, Cyrus," he piped, shaking hands with Westley and French. "Am I the first?"

"That you are, John," said French with a vague smile. "The others should be here any moment now."

Weaver offered the old man a chair. "Won't you sit down, Mr. Gray?"

Gray's seventy years sat lightly on his thin shoulders. He had a bird-like head covered with thin white hair. His face was the indeterminate color of parchment; it was constantly wreathed in smiles which lifted his white mustache above thin red lips. He wore a wing collar and an ascot tie.

He accepted the chair and sat down with a preposterously lithe movement.

"How was your trip, Cyrus?" he asked. "Did you find Whitney amenable?"

"Quite, quite!" returned French, resuming his pacing. "In fact, I should say that if we officially come to a complete agreement this morning, we can consummate the merger in less than a month."

"Fine! Good stroke of business!" John Gray rubbed his hands in a curious gesture; they rasped together.

There was a second knock at the door. Weaver again went into the anteroom.

"Mr. Trask and Mr. Marchbanks," he announced. "And if I'm not mistaken, there comes Mr. Zorn from the elevator." Two men passed into the room, and a moment later a third; whereupon Weaver hurried back to his chair by the desk. The door swung shut with a click.

The newcomers shook hands all around and dropped into chairs at a long conference table in the middle of the room. They made a peculiar group. Trask—A. Melville Trask in the Social Register—fell into a habitually drooping attitude, sprawling in his chair and playing idly with a pencil on the table before him. His associates paid little attention to him. Hubert Marchbanks sat down heavily. He was a fleshy man of forty-five, florid and clumsy-handed. At regular intervals his loud voice broke in an asthmatic wheeze. Cornelius Zorn regarded his fellow directors from behind old-fashioned gold-rimmed eyeglasses. His head was bald and square, his fingers were thick, and he wore a reddish mustache. His short figure completely filled the chair. He looked startlingly like a prosperous butcher.

French took a seat at the head of the table and regarded the others solemnly.

"Gentlemen—this is a meeting which will go down in the history of department store merchandising." He paused, cleared his throat. "Westley, will you see that a man is posted at the door so that we may continue absolutely undisturbed?"

"Yes, sir." Weaver picked up the telephone on the desk and said, "Mr. Crouther's office, please." A moment later he said, "Crouther? Who? Oh, yes. . . . Never mind looking for him; you can take care of it. Send one of the store detectives up to the door of Mr. French's private

apartment. He is to see that no one disturbs Mr. French while the Board meeting is going on. . . . He is not to interrupt us—merely station himself at the door. . . . Whom will you send? . . . Oh! Jones? Good enough. Tell Crouther about it when he comes in. . . . Oh, he's been in since nine? Well, tell him for me when you see him; I'm very busy just now." He hung up and returned quickly to a chair at French's right. He snatched his pencil and poised it over his notebook.

The five directors were poring over a sheaf of papers. French sat staring at the blue May sky outside while they familiarized themselves with the details of the documents, his heavy hands restless on the table top.

Suddenly he turned to Weaver and said in an undertone, "I'd almost forgotten, Westley. Get the house on the wire. Let's see—it's eleven-fifteen. They should be up by this time. Mrs. French may be anxious about me—I haven't communicated with her since I left for Great Neck yesterday."

Weaver gave the number of the French house to the operator, and a moment later spoke incisively into the mouthpiece.

"Hortense? Is Mrs. French up yet? . . . Well, is Marion there, then? Or Bernice? . . . Very well, let me speak with Marion. . . ."

He shifted his body away from French, who was talking in a low tone to old John Gray. Weaver's eyes were bright and his face suddenly flushed.

"Hello, hello! Marion?" he breathed into the telephone. "This is Wes. I'm sorry—you know—I'm calling from the apartment—your father would like to speak to you. . . ."

A woman's low voice answered. "Westley dear! I understand. . . . Oh, I'm so sorry, darling, but if father's there we can't talk very long. You love me? Say it!"

"Oh, but I *can't*," whispered Weaver fiercely, his back rigid and formal. But his face, turned away from French, was eloquent.

"I know you can't, silly boy." The girl laughed. "I just said it to make you wriggle. But you do, don't you?" She laughed again.

"Yes. Yes. Oh, YES!"

"Then let me talk to father, darling."

Weaver cleared his throat hastily and turned to French.

"Here's Marion at last, sir," he said, handing the instrument to the old man. "Hortense Underhill says that neither Mrs. French nor Bernice has come down yet."

French hurriedly took the telephone from Weaver's hands. "Marion, this is father. I've just arrived from Great Neck and I'm feeling fine. Everything all right? . . . What's the matter? You seem a little tired. . . . All right, dear. I merely wanted to let you know that I'm back safely. You might tell Mother for me—I'll be too busy to call again this morning. Good-by, dear."

He returned to his chair, looked gravely around at the Board, and said, "Now gentlemen, since you've had a few moments to become familiar with the figures I thrashed out with Whitney, let's get to work." He brandished a forefinger.

* * * *

At eleven forty-five the telephone bell jangled, interrupting a heated discussion between French and Zorn. Weaver's hand leaped to the instrument.

"Hello, hello! Mr. French is very busy just now. . . . Is that you, Hortense? What is it? . . . Just a moment." He turned to French. "Pardon me, sir—Hortense Underhill is on the wire and she seems disturbed about something. Will you talk to her or call back?"

French glared at Zorn, who was fiercely dabbing away

the perspiration on his thick neck, and snatched the telephone from Weaver.

"Well, what is it?"

A quavering feminine voice answered. "Mr. French, something dreadful's happened. I can't find Mrs. French or Miss Bernice!"

"Eh? What's that you say? What's the matter? Where are they?"

"I don't know, sir. They hadn't rung for the maids all morning, and I went up to see if anything was wrong a few minutes ago. You'll—you'll never believe it, sir—I can't understand—"

"Well!"

"Their beds aren't touched. I don't think they slept home last night."

French's voice rose in anger. "You silly woman—is that why you're interrupting my Board meeting? It was raining last night and they probably stayed overnight somewhere with friends."

"But Mr. French—they would have called, or—"

"Please, Hortense! Go back to your housework. I'll look into this later." He slammed the receiver on the hook.

"Foolishness . . ." he muttered. Then he shrugged his shoulders. He turned to Zorn again, palms on the table. "Now what's that? Do you mean to tell me that you'd stand in the way of this merger just because of a paltry few thousands? Let me tell you something, Zorn. . . ."

French's occupied a square block in the heart of the midtown section of New York, on Fifth Avenue. On the borderline between the more fashionable upper avenue and

the office-building district farther downtown, it catered to a mixed patronage of wealth and penury. At the noon hour its broad aisles and six floors were crowded with shop girls and stenographers; in mid-afternoon the tone of its clientele improved perceptibly. It boasted at once therefore the lowest prices, the most modern models, the widest assortment of saleable articles, in New York. As a result of this compromise between attractive prices and exclusive merchandise it was the most popular department store in the city. From nine o'clock in the morning until five-thirty in the evening French's was thronged with shoppers, the sidewalks surrounding the marble structure and its many wings almost impassable.

Cyrus French, pioneer department store owner, assisted by his associate Board, exerted the full financial strength of his powerful organization to make French's—an institution of two generations of French ownership—the show place of the city. In those days, long before the artistic movement had been communicated in the United States to the more practical articles of use and wear, French's had already made contact with its European representatives and held public exhibitions of art objects, art furniture, and kindred modernistic ware. These exhibits attracted huge crowds to the store. One of its main windows fronting Fifth Avenue was devoted to exhibits of periodically imported articles. This window became the focal point for the eyes of all New York. Curious throngs constantly besieged its sheathing of plate glass.

On the morning of Tuesday the twenty-fourth of May, at three minutes of the noon hour, the heavy unpaneled door to this window opened and a Negress in black dress, white apron and white cap entered. She sauntered about the window, seemed to appraise its contents, and then stood stiffly at attention, as if awaiting a predetermined moment to begin her mysterious work.

The contents of the window were arranged to illustrate a combination living-room and bedroom, of an ultra-modern design created by Paul Lavery, of Paris, according to a placard in a corner. This card acknowledged Lavery's authorship of the articles on exhibition, and called attention to "lectures on the fifth floor by M. Lavery." The rear wall, into which the one door opened by which the Negress had entered, was unrelieved by ornament and tinted a pastelle green. On this wall hung a huge Venetian mirror, unframed, its edges cut in an irregular design. Against the wall stood a long narrow table, exhibiting an unpainted grain highly waxed. On the table stood a squat prismatic lamp, made of a clouded glass procurable at that period only from a unique modern art-objects factory in Austria. Odd pieces—chairs, end-tables, bookcases, a divan, all of unorthodox construction, peculiar and daring in conception—stood about the gleaming floor of the window-room. The side walls served as background for several pieces of miscellaneous utility.

The lighting fixtures in the ceiling and on the side walls were all of the "concealed" variety rapidly gaining vogue on the Continent.

At the stroke of noon the Negress, who had remained motionless since her entrance into the room, stirred into activity. By this time a viscid mass of people had gathered outside the window on the sidewalk, awaiting the Negress's demonstration with hungry eyes and restless shoulders.

Setting down a metal rack on which were hung a number of simply lettered placards, the Negress picked up a long ivory wand and, pointing to the legend on the first placard, proceeded solemnly to one of the pieces on the east wall and began a pantomimic demonstration of its construction and properties.

The fifth placard—by this time the crowd had doubled in size and overflowed from the sidewalk—bore the words:

WALL—BED

This Article of Furniture
Is Concealed in the West
Wall and Is Operated Elec-
trically by a Push-Button.
It is of Special Design,
Created by M. Paul Lavery,
and Is the Only One of Its
Kind in This Country.

Pointing to the words once more, for emphasis, the Negress sedately walked to the west wall, indicated with a flourish a small ivory button set in a nacreous panel, and touched the button with one long black finger.

Before pressing it, she looked out once more on the jostling, expectant crowd before the window. Necks craned eagerly to see the marvel about to be revealed.

What they saw was a marvel indeed—so unexpected, so horrible, so grotesque that at the instant of its occurrence faces froze into masks of stunned incredulity. It was like a moment snatched out of an unbelievable nightmare. . . . For, as the Negress pushed the ivory button, a section of the wall slid outward and downward with a swift noiseless movement, two small wooden legs unfolded and shot out of the forepart of the bedstead, the bed settled to a horizontal position—and the body of a woman, pale-faced, crumpled, distorted, her clothes bloody in two places, fell from the silken sheet to the floor at the Negress's feet.

It was twelve-fifteen exactly.

4

"ALL THE KING'S HORSES"

The Negress uttered one horrified shriek, so piercing that it was distinctly audible through the heavy glass window,

rolled her eyes wildly, and fell fainting at the side of the body.

The spectators outside still presented a tableau—they were stricken into silence, petrified with fright. Then a woman on the sidewalk, her face pressed immovably to the glass, screamed. Immobility became frenzy, silence a dull unpunctuated roar. The crowd surged away from the window, pushing madly backward, stampeding in terror. A child fell and was trampled in the crush. A police whistle blew, and a bluecoat ran shouting through the crowd, using his club freely. He seemed bewildered by the uproar—he had not yet seen the two still figures in the exhibition-window.

Suddenly the door in the window burst open and a lean man wearing a short pointed beard and a monocle ran into the room. His staring eyes took in the two motionless figures on the shining floor, traveled jerkily to the milling crowd outside and the policeman swinging his club, and returned with dazed disbelief to the floor. With a soundless oath he sprang forward, grasped a heavy silk cord in a corner near the plate-glass window, and pulled. A translucent curtain fell immediately, shutting off the view of the frantic people in the street.

The bearded man knelt at the side of the Negress, felt her pulse, hesitantly touched the skin of the other woman, rose and ran back to the door. A growing crowd of sales-girls and shoppers was collecting on the main floor of the department store, just outside the window. Three men—floorwalkers—rushed through as if to enter.

The man in the window spoke sharply: "You—get the head store detective at once—no, never mind—here he comes—Mr. Crouther! *Mr. Crouther!* This way! Here!"

A heavy-set, broad-shouldered man with a mottled complexion shoved his way, cursing, through the crowd. He had just reached the entrance of the window when the

policeman who had dispersed the crowd on the sidewalk ran up and dashed after him into the window. The three men disappeared, the bluecoat slamming the door shut behind them.

The bearded man stood aside. "There's been a terrible accident, Crouther. . . . Glad you're here, officer. . . . My God, what an affair!"

The head store detective pounded across the room and glared down at the two women. "What happened to the coon, Mr. Lav-ery?" he bellowed at the bearded man.

"Fainted, I suppose!"

"Here, Crouther, let me take a look," said the policeman, unceremoniously pushing Lavery aside. He bent over the body of the woman who had tumbled from the bed.

Crouther cleared his throat importantly. "Listen here, Bush. This is no time to make an examination. We oughtn't to touch a thing until Headquarters is notified. Mr. Lav-ery and me—we'll stand guard here while you use the 'phone. Go ahead now, Bush, don't be an egg!"

The policeman stood undecidedly for a moment, scratched his head, and finally left the room with hurried steps.

"This is one sweet mess," growled Crouther. "What happened here, Mr. Lav-ery? Who in hell is *this* woman?"

Lavery started nervously and plucked at his beard with long thin fingers. "Why, don't you know? But of course not. . . . Good Heavens, Crouther, what are we to do?"

Crouther frowned. "Now don't go getting yourself all excited, Mr. Lav-ery. This is a police job, pure and simple. Lucky I was on the scene so quick. We gotta wait for the detail from Headquarters. Just take it easy now—"

Lavery regarded the store detective coldly. "I'm perfectly all right, Mr. Crouther," he said. "I suggest—" he

weighted the word with authority—"that you immediately marshal your store forces to keep order on the main floor. Make it appear as if nothing out of the way has happened. Call Mr. MacKenzie. Send somebody to notify Mr. French and the Board of Directors. I understand they're having a meeting upstairs. This is—an affair of a grave nature—graver than you know. Go now!"

Crouther looked at Lavery rebelliously, shook his head, and made for the door. As he opened it a small dark man with a physician's bag stepped into the room. He glanced quickly around and without a word crossed to the side of the two bodies.

He favored the Negress with a scant glance and a feeling of the pulse. He spoke without looking up.

"Here—Mr. Lavery, is it?—you'll have to help—get one of the men outside to give you a hand—the Negress has merely fainted—get her a glass of water and put her on that divan there—send somebody for one of the nurses from the infirmary. . . ."

Lavery nodded. He went to the door and looked out over the whispering crowd on the floor.

"Mr. MacKenzie! Here, please!"

A middle-aged man with a pleasant Scotch face hurried up and into the room. "Help me, please," said Lavery.

The doctor busied himself over the body of the other woman. His movements concealed her face. Lavery and MacKenzie picked up the reviving form of the Negress and carried her to the divan. A floorwalker outside was dispatched for a glass of water and reappeared in a twinkling. The Negress gulped, groaned.

The doctor looked up gravely. "This woman is dead," he announced. "Has been for quite a while. What's more, she's been shot. Got it in the heart. Looks like murder, Mr. Lavery!"

"*Nom du chien!*" muttered Lavery. His face was sickly white.

MacKenzie scurried across the room to look down at the huddled corpse. He fell back with a cry.

"Good God! *It's Mrs. French!*"

5

"AND ALL THE KING'S MEN"

The window-door opened quickly and two men stepped in. One, a tall lank individual smoking a blackish cigar, stopped short, peered about him, and then, catching sight of the body, immediately advanced to the farther side of the wall bed, on the floor by which lay the dead woman. He favored the little physician with a keen glance, nodded and without further ado dropped to his knees. After a moment he looked up.

"The store doctor, are you?"

The physician nodded nervously. "Yes. I've made a superficial examination. She's dead. I—"

"I can see that," said the newcomer. "I'm Prouty, Assistant Medical Examiner. Stand by, doctor." Again he bent over the body, opening his bag with one hand.

The second of the two men who had arrived was an iron-jawed giant. He had stopped at the door, softly prodding it shut behind him. Now his eyes flickered over the frozen faces of Lavery, MacKenzie and the store doctor. His own face was cold and harsh and expressionless.

It was not until Dr. Prouty began his examination that this man vitalized into action. He took a purposeful step forward toward MacKenzie, but stopped suddenly as the door shivered under a violent pounding.

"Come in!" he said sharply, standing between the door and the bed, so that the body was hidden from the newcomers.

The door was flung aside. A small army of men surged forward. The tall man blocked their path.

"Just a moment," he said slowly. "We can't have so many people in here. Who are you?"

Cyrus French, flushed and choleric, snapped: "I am the owner of this establishment, and these gentlemen all have a right to be here. They are the Board of Directors—this is Mr. Crouther, our head store detective—stand aside, please."

The tall man did not move. "Mr. French, eh? Board of Directors? . . . Hello, Crouther. . . . Who is this?" He pointed to Westley Weaver, who hovered about the edge of the group, a trifle pale.

"Mr. Weaver, my secretary," said French impatiently. "Who are you, sir? What's happened here? Let me pass."

"I see." The tall man reflected a moment, hesitated, then said firmly, "I'm Sergeant Velie of the Homicide Squad. Sorry, Mr. French, but you'll have to abide by my orders here. Come in, but don't touch anything and let me give the orders." He stepped aside. He seemed to be waiting for something with unwearying patience.

Lavery ran forward, his eyes distended as he saw Cyrus French stride toward the bed. He intercepted the old man, grasped his lapel.

"Mr. French—please do not look—just now. . . ."

French petulantly brushed him aside. "Let me be, Lavery! What is this—a conspiracy? Ordered about in my own store!" He proceeded to the bed, and Lavery fell back, a resigned look on his mobile face. Suddenly, as if struck by a thought, he took John Gray aside, speaking in the director's ear. Gray paled, stood transfixed to the spot, then with an indistinct cry he leaped to French's side.

He was just in time. The store owner had bent curiously over Dr. Prouty's shoulder, taken one look at the woman on the floor, and collapsed without a sound. Gray caught him

as he sank. Lavery sprang forward and assisted in carrying the old man's limp body to a chair on the other side of the room.

A nurse in white cap and gown had slipped into the room and was ministering to the hysterical Negress on the divan. She went quickly over to French, slipped a vial under his nose, and instructed Lavery to chafe his hands. Gray paced nervously up and down, muttering to himself. The store doctor hurried over to help the nurse.

The directors and the secretary, huddled together in a horror-struck group, moved hesitantly toward the body. Weaver and Marchbanks cried out together at seeing the woman's face. Zorn bit his lip and turned away. Trask averted his face in horror. Then, in the same mechanical motion, they moved slowly backward to a corner, glancing helplessly at each other.

Velie crooked a huge finger at Crouther. "What have you done?"

The store detective grinned. "Taken care of all the details, don't you worry. I've got all my men scrambled on the main floor and they've scattered the mob. Got everything well in hand. Trust Bill Crouther for that, Sergeant! Won't be much for you guys to do, that's a fact."

Velie grunted. "Well, here's something for you to do while we're waiting. Get a big stretch of the main floor roped off right around this section, and keep everybody away. It's a little late now, I suppose, to close the doors. Wouldn't do much good. Whoever did this job is miles away from here by now. Get going, Crouther!"

The store detective nodded, turned away, turned back. "Say, Sergeant—know just who the woman on the floor is? Might help us right now."

"Yes?" Velie smiled frostily. "Can't see how. But it

doesn't take much to figure it out. It's French's wife. Blast it, this is a great place for a murder!"

"No!" Crouther's jaw dropped. "French's wife, hey? The big cheese himself. . . . Well, well!" He stole a glance at the slack figure of French and a moment later his voice resounded through the window as he roared instructions outside.

Silence in the window-room. The group in the corner had not moved. The Negress and French had both been revived—the black woman's eyes rolling wildly as she clung to the starched skirt of the nurse, French's face a pasty white as he half-lay in the chair listening to Gray's low-voiced words of sympathy. Gray himself seemed drained of his queer vitality.

Velie beckoned to MacKenzie, who hovered nervously at Prouty's shoulder.

"You're MacKenzie, the store manager?"

"Yes, Sergeant."

"It's time to get a move on, Mr. MacKenzie." Velie eyed him coldly. "Get a hold on yourself. Somebody's got to keep his wits about him. This is part of your job." The store manager squared his shoulders. "Now listen. This is important and it's got to be done thoroughly." He lowered his voice. "No employees to leave the building—item number one, and I'm holding you responsible for its execution. Number two, check up on all employees who are not at their posts. Number three, make out a list of all employees absent from the store to-day, with the reasons for their absence. Hop to it!"

MacKenzie mumbled submissively, shuffled away.

Velie took Lavery, who stood talking to Weaver, to one side.

"You seem to have some authority here. May I ask who you are?"

"My name is Paul Lavery, and I am exhibiting the mod-

ern furniture on display upstairs on the fifth floor. This room is a sample of my exhibition."

"I see. Well, you've kept your head, Mr. Lavery. The dead woman is Mrs. French?"

Lavery averted his eyes. "Yes, Sergeant. It was quite a shock to all of us, no doubt. How in God's name did she ever get—" He stopped abruptly, worried his lip.

"Did she ever get here, you meant to say?" finished Velie grimly. "Well now, that's a question, isn't it? I—Just a moment, Mr. Lavery!"

He turned on his heel and walked swiftly to the door to greet a group of new arrivals.

"Morning, Inspector. Morning, Mr. Queen! Glad you've come, sir. You'll find things in a rotten mess." He stepped aside and waved a large hand at the room and its assorted occupants. "Pretty, eh, sir? More like a wake than the scene of a crime!" It was a long speech for Velie.

Inspector Richard Queen—small, pert, like a white-thatched bird—followed the circuit of Velie's hand with his eyes.

"My goodness!" he exclaimed in annoyance. "How did so many people get into this room? I'm surprised at you, Thomas."

"Inspector." Queen paused at Velie's deep voice. "I thought it might—" his voice became inaudible as he murmured a few words in the Inspector's ear.

"Yes, yes, I see, Thomas." The Inspector patted his arm. "Tell me soon. Let's have a peep at the body."

He trotted across the room and slipped to the far side of the wall-bed. Prouty, his hands busy on the corpse, nodded in greeting.

"Murder," he said. "No sign of the revolver."

The Inspector peered intently into the ghastly face of the dead woman, ran his eye over the disarranged clothing.

"Well, we'll have the boys look a little later. Keep going, Doc." He sighed and returned to Velie at the other side of the room.

"Now let's have it, Thomas. From the beginning." His little eyes roved judiciously about the men in the room as Velie rapidly outlined in an undertone the events of the past half-hour. . . . Outside a body of plainclothes men and a scattering of uniformed policemen could be seen. The patrolman, Bush, was among them.

Ellery Queen shut the door and leaned against it. He was tall and sparely built, with athletic hands, taper-fingered. He wore immaculate grey tweeds and carried a stick and a light coat. On his thin nose perched a pince-nez. Above it rose a forehead of wide proportions, white and untroubled. His hair was smoothly black. From the pocket of the coat protruded a small volume in faded covers.

He looked curiously at each person in the room—curiously and slowly, as if he enjoyed his scrutiny. The characteristics of each individual as his eyes passed from one to another he seemed to store away in a corner of his brain. His examination was almost visibly digestive. Yet it was not entirely concentrated, for he listened intently to each word of Velie's recital to the Inspector. Suddenly his eyes, in their panoramic course, met those of Westley Weaver, who stood miserably in a corner leaning against the wall.

Into the eyes of each leaped instant recognition. They started forward simultaneously, hands outstretched.

"Ellery Queen. Thank God!"

"By the Seven Virgins of Theophilus—Westley Weaver!" They wrung each other's hands with undisguised pleasure. Inspector Queen glanced their way, quizzically; then he turned back to hear the last of Velie's rumbled comments.

"It's awfully good seeing your classic features again, Ellery," murmured Weaver. His face dropped back into strained lines. "Are you—is that the Inspector?"

"In the indefatigable flesh, Westley," said Ellery. "The pater himself, with his nose to the scent.—But tell me things, boy. It's—O Tempes!—isn't it five or six years since we last met?"

"All of that, Ellery. I'm glad you're here, for more than one reason, El. It's a little comforting," said Weaver in a low voice. "This—this thing. . . ."

Ellery's smile faded. "The tragedy, eh, Westley? Tell me—how do you figure in it? You didn't kill the lady, by any chance?" His tone was jocular, but behind it was a certain anxiety which his father, ears cocked, found a little strange.

"Ellery!" Weaver's eyes met his straightforwardly. "That isn't even funny." Then the look of misery crept in again. "It's awful, El. Just awful. You haven't any idea how awful it is. . . ."

Ellery patted Weaver's arm lightly, removed his pince-nez with an absent motion. "I'll get it all in a moment, Westley. I'll hold *tête-à-tête* conversation with you later. Hang on, won't you? I see my father signaling me frantically. Chin up, Wes!" He moved away, again smiling. Weaver's eyes held a glimmer of hope as he dropped back against the wall.

The Inspector murmured to his son for a moment. Ellery made a low-voiced reply. Then Ellery strode over to the farther side of the bed and stood over Prouty, watching the medical examiner as he worked swiftly over the body.

The Inspector turned to the assembled crowd in the room. "A little quiet now, please," he said.

A thick curtain of silence dropped over the room.

TESTIMONY

The Inspector stepped forward.

"It will be necessary for every one to wait here," he began sententiously, "while we make some elementary but essential investigations. Let me say at once, to forestall any claims of special privilege that may be made, that this is undoubtedly a case of murder. In cases of murder, the most serious charge that can be brought against an individual, the law is no respecter either of persons or institutions. A woman is dead of violence. Somebody killed her. That somebody may be miles away at this moment, or in this room now. You can understand, gentlemen"—and his tired eyes considered the five directors especially—"that the sooner we get down to business, the better. Too much time has been lost already."

He went abruptly to the door, opened it, and called in a penetrating voice: "Piggott! Hesse! Hagstrom! Flint! Johnson! Ritter!"

Six detectives strolled into the room. Ritter, a burly man, closed the door behind him.

"Hagstrom, your book." The detective whipped out a small notebook and a pencil.

"Piggott, Hesse, Flint—the room!" He added something in a low tone. The three detectives grinned and dispersed to different portions of the room. They began a slow, methodical search of furniture, floors, walls.

"Johnson—the bed!" One of the two remaining men went directly to the wall-bed and began to examine its contents.

"Ritter—stand by." The Inspector slipped his hands into a coat pocket and withdrew his brown old snuff-box. He filled his nostrils with aromatic snuff, inhaled deeply and restored the box to his pocket.

"Now!" he said, and glared about the room at his thoroughly cowed audience. Ellery met his eye for an instant and smiled slightly. "Now! You, there!" He pointed an accusing finger at the Negress, who was staring at him with wide eyes, her skin greyish-violet with fright.

"Yassuh," she quavered, tottering to her feet.

"Your name?" snapped Queen.

"Di—Diana Johnson, suh," she whispered, gazing at him in scared fascination.

"Diana Johnson, eh?" The Inspector took a step forward, leveled his finger at her. "Why did you open this bed at twelve-fifteen today?"

"Ah—Ah had to, suh," she faltered. "Dat was—"

Lavery waved his arm hesitantly at the Inspector. "I can explain that—"

"Sir!" Lavery colored, then smiled cynically. "Go on, Johnson."

"Yassuh, yassuh! Dat was de reg'lar time fo' de exhibition, suh. Ah always comes out into dis room at a couple o' minutes befo' twelve an' gets ready fo' de exhibition, suh." The words tumbled out. "An' den, when Ah'd just got through showin' dis contraption hyah"—she indicated the divan, which seemed a combination of sofa, bed and bookcase—"Ah goes to de wall, pushes de button, and den dat—dat dead 'ooman falls out right at mah feet. . . ." She shuddered and drew a deep breath, glancing at the detective Hagstrom, who was busily taking down her words in shorthand.

"You had no idea the body was inside when you pressed the button, Miss Johnson?" demanded the Inspector.

The Negress's eyes flew wide open. "Nosuh! Ah wouldn't 'a' teched dat bed fo' a thousan' dolluhs ef Ah'd know dat!" The uniformed nurse giggled nervously. She sobered instantly as the Inspector stared in her direction.

"Very well. That's all." He turned to Hagstrom.

"Got every word?" The detective nodded, maintaining a severe silence as the old man winked fleetingly at him. Inspector Queen turned back to the group. "Nurse, take Diana Johnson to your hospital upstairs and keep her there until I give the word!"

The Negress stumbled in her eagerness to leave the window-room. The nurse followed somewhat sulkily behind.

The Inspector had Patrolman Bush summoned. The policeman saluted, answered a few questions about what had occurred on the sidewalk at the moment the body fell, and subsequently inside the window-room, and was commissioned to go back to his post on Fifth Avenue.

"Crouther!" The store detective was standing by the side of Ellery and Dr. Prouty. He now slouched forward and stared boldly at Queen. "You're the head store detective?"

"Yes, Inspector." He shuffled his feet and grinned, displaying tobacco-stained teeth.

"Sergeant Velie tells me that he instructed you to scatter your men through the main floor soon after the body was discovered. Have you attended to that?"

"Yes, sir. Got a squad of a half-dozen store detectives workin' outside, and put every available 'spotter' on the job, too," replied Crouther promptly. "But they haven't turned up anybody suspicious yet."

"Could hardly expect it." The Inspector took another pinch of snuff. "Tell me just what you found when you came in here."

"Well, Inspector, the first I knew about the murder was when one of my detectives 'phoned me upstairs in my office that something had happened outside on the sidewalk—riot or something. I came down right away and as I passed this window I heard Mr. Lavery yell for me. I ran in, saw the body layin' here, and the darky fainting on the floor. Bush, the officer on the beat, came in right after

me. I told 'em nothing ought to be touched until the Headquarters men got here, and then got right after the mobs outside, and generally kept an eye on everything until Sergeant Velie got here. I followed his orders after that, that's a fact. I—"

"Here, here, Crouther, that's plenty," said the Inspector. "Don't leave, I may be able to use you later. Short-handed enough as it is, the Lord knows. A department store!" He muttered under his breath and turned to Dr. Prouty.

"Doc! Ready for me yet?"

The kneeling police doctor nodded. "Just about, Inspector. Want me to shoot the works right here?" He seemed tacitly to question the wisdom of imparting his information before a group of laymen.

"Might as well," grunted Queen. "It can't be very enlightening."

"Don't know about that." Prouty stood up with a groan, took a firmer grip on the black cigar between his teeth.

"Woman was killed by two bullets," he said deliberately, "both from a Colt .38 revolver. Probably from the same gun—hard to tell exactly without putting them under the microscope." He held up two encarmined blobs of metal, blunted completely out of shape. The Inspector took them, turned them over in his fingers, and in silence handed them to Ellery, who immediately bent over them with a curious eagerness.

Prouty stared dreamily down at the body, plunging his hands into his pockets. "One bullet," he continued, "entered the body directly in the center of the cardiac region. Nice jagged *pericardial* wound, Inspector. Smashed the *sternum* bone, pierced the *pericardial septum*, which is the membrane separating the *pericardium* from the main body cavity, then took the logical course through—first the fibrous layer of the *pericardium*, then the serous inner layer,

and finally the anterior tip of the heart, where the great vessels are. Spilled quite a bit of the yellow *pericardial* fluid, too. Bullet entered the body at an angle and it's left a fearful wound. . . ."

"Then death was instantaneous?" asked Ellery. "The second bullet was unnecessary?"

"Quite," said Prouty dryly. "Death would be instantaneous from either wound. As a matter of fact, the second bullet—maybe it's not the second, though, I can't tell of course which hit her first—bullet number two made a better job of it than even bullet number one. Because it penetrated the *precordia*, which is the region a little below the heart and above the abdomen. This is also a ragged wound, and since the *precordial* sector takes in muscles and blood-vessels of major importance, it's as vital a spot as the heart itself. . . ." Prouty stopped suddenly. His eyes strayed almost with irritation to the dead woman on the floor.

"Was the revolver fired close to the body?" put in the Inspector.

"No powder stains, Inspector," said Prouty, still regarding the corpse with a frown.

"Were both bullets fired from the same spot?" asked Ellery.

"Hard to say. The lateral angles are similar, indicating that whoever fired both bullets stood to the right of the woman. But the downward course of the bullets disturbs me. They're too much alike."

"What do you mean?" demanded Ellery, leaning forward.

"Well," growled Prouty, biting on his cigar, "if the woman were in exactly the same position when both shots were fired—assuming that both shots were fired almost simultaneously, of course—there should be a greater *downward* angle to the *precordial* wound than to the *pericardial*.

Because the *precordia* is located below the heart, and the gun would have to be aimed lower. . . . Well, perhaps I shouldn't say these things at all. There are any number of explanations, I suppose, for that difference in angle. Ought to have Ken Knowles look over the bullets and the wounds, though."

"He'll get his chance," said the Inspector with a sigh. "Is that all, Doc?"

Ellery looked up from another scrutiny of the two bullets. "How long has she been dead?"

Prouty replied promptly: "About twelve hours, I should say. I'll be able to fix the time of death more accurately after the autopsy. But she certainly died no earlier than midnight and probably no later than two in the morning."

"Through now?" asked Inspector Queen patiently.

"Yes. But there's one thing that has me a little. . . ." Prouty set his jaw. "There's something queer here, Inspector. From what I know of *precordial* wounds I can't believe that this one should have bled so little. You've noticed, I suppose, that the clothing above both wounds is stiff with coagulated blood, but not so much of it as you might expect. At least as a medical man might expect."

"Why?"

"I've seen plenty of *precordial* wounds," said Prouty calmly, "and they're messy, Inspector. Bleed like hell. In fact, especially in this case, where the hole is blasted pretty large, due to the angle, there should be pools and pools of it. The *pericardial* would bleed freely, but not profusely. But the other—I say, there's something queer here, and I thought I'd call it to your attention."

Ellery shot his father a warning glance as the old man opened his mouth to reply. The Inspector clamped his lips together and dismissed Prouty with a nod. Ellery returned the two bullets to Prouty, who put them carefully into his bag.

The police doctor unhurriedly covered the body with a sheet from the hanging bed and departed, his last words a promise to hurry the morgue wagon.

"Is the store physician here?" Queen asked.

The small dark doctor stepped uncertainly forward from a corner. His teeth gleamed as he said, "Yes, sir?"

"Have you anything to add to Dr. Prouty's analysis, doctor?" questioned Queen, with disarming gentleness.

"Not a thing, not a thing, sir," said the store physician, looking uneasily at Prouty's retreating figure. "A precise if somewhat sketchy diagnosis. The bullets entered—"

"Thank you, doctor." Inspector Queen turned his back on the little physician and beckoned imperiously to the store detective.

"Crouther," he asked in a low tone, "who's your head night-watchman?"

"O'Flaherty—Pete O'Flaherty, Inspector."

"How many watchmen are on duty here at night?"

"Four. O'Flaherty tends the night-door on the 39th Street side, Ralska and Powers do the rounds, and Bloom is on duty at the 39th Street night freight-entrance."

"Thanks." The Inspector turned to Detective Ritter. "Get hold of this man MacKenzie, the store manager, find the home addresses of O'Flaherty, Ralska, Powers and Bloom, and get 'em down here as fast as a cab will carry them. Scoot!" Ritter lumbered away.

Ellery suddenly straightened, adjusted his pince-nez more firmly on his nose, and strode over to his father. They held a whispered colloquy for a moment, whereupon Ellery quietly retreated to his vantage-point near the bed and the Inspector crooked his finger at Westley Weaver.

"Mr. Weaver," he asked, "I take it that you are Mr. French's confidential secretary?"

"Yes, sir," responded Weaver warily.

The Inspector glanced sidewise at Cyrus French, huddled exhausted in the chair. John Gray's small white hand was solicitously patting French's arm. "I'd rather not bother Mr. French at this time with questions.—You were with him all morning?"

"Yes, sir."

"Mr. French was not aware of Mrs. French's presence in the store?"

"No, sir!" The response was immediate and sharp. Weaver regarded Queen with suspicious eyes.

"Were you?"

"I? No, sir!"

"Hmmm!" The Inspector's chin sank on his chest, and he communed with himself for an instant. Suddenly his finger shot toward the group of directors on the other side of the room. "How about you gentlemen? Any of you know that Mrs. French was here—this morning or last night?"

There was a chorus of horrified noes. Cornelius Zorn's face grew red. He began to protest angrily.

"Please!" The Inspector's tone flung them back in silence. "Mr. Weaver. How is it that all these gentlemen are present in the store this morning? They're not here every day, are they?"

Weaver's frank face lightened, as if from relief. "All of our directors are active in the management of the store, Inspector. They're here every day, if only for an hour or so. As for this morning, there was a directors' meeting in Mr. French's private apartment upstairs."

"Eh?" Queen seemed pleased as well as startled. "A private apartment upstairs, you say? On what floor?"

"The sixth—that's the top floor of the store."

Ellery stirred into life. Again he crossed the floor, again he whispered to his father, and again the old man nodded.

"Mr. Weaver," continued the Inspector, a note of eagerness in his voice, "how long were you and the Board in Mr. French's private apartment this morning?"

Weaver seemed surprised at the question. "Why, all morning, Inspector. I arrived at about eight-thirty, Mr. French at about nine, and the other directors at a little past eleven."

"I see." The Inspector mused. "Did you leave the apartment at any time during the morning?"

"No, sir." The reply was snapped back at him.

"And the others—Mr. French, the directors?" pressed the Inspector patiently.

"No, sir! We were all there until one of the store detectives notified us that an accident had occurred here. And I must say, sir—"

"Westley, Westley . . ." murmured Ellery chidingly, and Weaver turned to him with startled eyes. They fell before the meaning glance of Ellery, and Weaver bit his lip nervously. He did not finish what he had begun to say.

"Now, sir." The Inspector seemed to be enjoying himself in a tired way—utterly disregarding the bewildered eyes of the many people in the room. "Now, sir! Be very careful. At what time did this notification come?"

"At twelve-twenty-five," replied Weaver in a calmer tone.

"Very well.—Every one then left the apartment?" Weaver nodded. "Did you lock the door?"

"The door closed after us, Inspector."

"And the apartment remained that way, unguarded?"

"Not at all," said Weaver promptly. "At the beginning of the conference this morning, at Mr. French's suggestion, I got one of the store detectives to stand guard outside the apartment door. He is probably still there, because his

orders were specific. In fact, I remember seeing him lounging about outside when we all rushed out to see what was the matter down here."

"*Very* good!" beamed the old man. "A store detective, you say? Reliable?"

"Absolutely, Inspector," said Crouther, from his corner. "Sergeant Velie knows him, too. Jones is his name—an ex-policeman—used to be on a beat with Velie." The Inspector looked at the Sergeant inquiringly; he nodded in confirmation.

"Thomas," said Queen with one hand digging into his side-pocket for a pinch of snuff, "see to it, will you? See if this Jones fellow is still there, if he's been there all the time, if he's seen anything, if any one tried to get into the apartment since Mr. French, Mr. Weaver and the other gentlemen left. And take one of the boys along to relieve him—to relieve him, you understand?"

Velie grunted stonily and tramped out of the window-room. As he left, a policeman entered, saluted Inspector Queen and reported, "There's a 'phone call out there in the leather-goods department for a Mr. Westley Weaver, Inspector."

"What's that? Call?" The Inspector turned on Weaver, who stood miserably in a corner.

Weaver straightened. "Probably from Krafft of the Comptroller's office," he said. "I was to give him a report this morning, and the meeting and everything that happened afterward drove it out of my mind. . . . May I leave?"

Queen hesitated, his glance flickering toward Ellery, who was absently fingering his pince-nez. Ellery gave a slight nod.

"Go ahead," the Inspector growled to Weaver. "But come right back."

Weaver followed the policeman to the leather-goods

counter directly facing the door of the window-room. A clerk eagerly handed the telephone to him.

"Hello—Krafft? This is Weaver speaking. I'm sorry about that report— Who? Oh."

A curious change came over his face as he heard Marion French's voice over the wire. He lowered his voice immediately and bent over the instrument. The policeman, lounging behind him, surreptitiously shuffled closer, trying to catch the conversation.

"Why, what's the matter, dear?" asked Marion, a note of anxiety in her voice. "Is anything wrong? I tried to get you at the apartment, but there was no answer. The operator had to search for you. . . . I thought father had a directors' meeting this morning."

"Marion!" Weaver's voice was insistent. "I really can't stop to explain now. Something's happened, dearest—something so . . ." He stopped, seemed to be wrestling mentally with some problem. His lips tightened. "Sweet-heart, will you do something for me?"

"But, Wes dear," came the girl's anxious voice, "whatever is the matter? Has anything happened to father?"

"No—no." Weaver hunched desperately over the telephone. "Be my own honey and don't ask questions now. . . . Where are you now?"

"Why, at home, dear. But, Wes, what *is* the trouble?" There was a frightened catch in her voice. "Has it anything to do with Winifred or Bernice? They're not at home, Wes—haven't been all night. . . ." Then she laughed a little. "But there! I shan't worry you, dearest. I'll take a cab and be down in fifteen minutes."

"I knew you would." Weaver almost sobbed in a tense relief. "Whatever happens, sweet, I love you, I love you, do you understand?"

"Westley! You silly boy—you've frightened me out of my wits. Good-by now—I'll be downtown in a jiffy."

There was a tender little sound through the receiver—it might have been a kiss—and Weaver hung up with a sigh.

The policeman jumped back as Weaver turned—jumped back with a broad grin. Weaver flushed furiously, started to speak, then shook his head.

"There's a young lady coming down here, officer," he said swiftly. "She'll be here in about a quarter of an hour. Won't you please let me know the moment she gets here? She's Miss Marion French. I'll be in the window."

The bluecoat lost his grin. "Well now," he said slowly, scraping his jaw, "I just don't know about that. Guess you'll have to tell the Inspector about it. I haven't the authority."

He marched Weaver back into the window-room against the young man's protests at the heavy hand on his arm.

"Inspector," he said respectfully, still grasping Weaver's arm, "this feller wants me to let him know when a certain young lady by the name of Miss Marion French gets here."

Queen looked up in surprise, a surprise that deepened rapidly into brusqueness. "Was that telephone call from your Mr. Krafft?" he asked Weaver.

Before Weaver could speak, the policeman interposed: "Not by a long sight, sir. 'Twas a lady, and I think he called her 'Marion.'"

"Look here, Inspector!" said Weaver hotly, shaking off the bluecoat's hand. "This is asinine. I thought the call was from Mr. Krafft, but it was Miss French—Mr. French's daughter. A—a semi-business call. And I took the liberty of asking her to come down here immediately. That's all. Is that a crime? As for letting me know when she arrives—I naturally want to spare her the shock of walking into this place and seeing her step-mother's dead body on the floor."

The Inspector took a pinch of snuff, glancing mildly from Weaver to Ellery. "I see. I see. I'm sorry, Mr.

Weaver. . . . That's right, isn't it, officer?" he snapped, whirling on the bluecoat.

"Yes, sir! Heard it all plain as day. He's telling the truth."

"And mighty fortunate for him he is," grumbled the Inspector. "Stand back, Mr. Weaver. We'll attend to the young lady when she arrives. . . . Now then!" he cried, rubbing his hands, "Mr. French!"

The old man looked up in bleary bewilderment, his eyes blank and staring.

"Mr. French, is there anything you would like to say that might clear up some of this mystery?"

"I—I—I—beg—your—pardon?" stammered French, raising his head with an effort from the back-cushion of the chair. He seemed stricken by his wife's death to the point of imbecility.

Queen regarded him with pity, looked into the eyes of John Gray, whose face was threatening, muttered, "Never mind," and squared his shoulders. "Ellery, my son, how about a careful look-see at the body?" He peered at Ellery from beneath overhung brows.

Ellery stirred. "Lookers-on," he said clearly, "see more than players. And if you think that quotation is inept, dad, you don't know your son's favorite author, Anonymous. Play on!"

7

THE CORPSE

Inspector Queen moved over to the other side of the room, where the body lay between the bed and the window. Waving aside the detective Johnson, who was rummaging among the bedclothes, the old man knelt on the floor beside the dead woman. He removed the white sheet.

Ellery bent over his father's shoulder, his gaze detached but characteristically panoramic.

The body lay in an oddly crumpled position, the left arm outstretched, the right slightly crooked beneath the back. The head was in profile, a brown toque-style hat pushed pathetically over one eye. Mrs. French had been a small slender woman, with delicate hands and feet. The eyes were fixed in a sort of bewildered glare, wide open. The mouth drooled; a thin trickle of blood, now dark and dry, streaked the chin.

The clothes were simple and severe, but rich in quality, as might be expected from a woman of Mrs. French's age and position. There was a light brown cloth coat, trimmed at the collar and cuffs with brown fox; a dark tan dress of a jersey material, with a breast and waist design of orange and brown; brown silk stockings and a pair of uncompromising brown walking shoes.

The Inspector looked up.

"Notice the mud on her shoes, El?" he asked *sotto voce*.

Ellery nodded. "Doesn't take a heap of perspicacity," he remarked. "It rained all day yesterday; remember the downpour last night? No wonder the poor lady wet her patrician feet. As a matter of fact, you can see traces of the wet even on the trimming of the toque.—Yes, dad, Mrs. French was out in the rain yesterday. Not very important."

"Why not?" the old man asked, his hands softly moving aside the collar of the coat.

"Because she probably wet her shoes and hat in crossing the sidewalk to the store," retorted Ellery. "What of it?"

The Inspector did not reply. His seeking hand plunged suddenly beneath the coat-collar and reappeared with a filmy, color-clouded scarf.

"Here's something," he said, turning the gauze-like material over in his hands. "Must have slipped down inside

the coat when she tumbled out of the bed." An exclamation escaped him. On one corner of the scarf was a silk-embroidered monogram. Ellery leaned farther forward over his father's shoulder.

"M.F.," he said. He straightened up, frowning, saying nothing.

The Inspector turned his head toward the group of directors at the other side of the room. They were huddled together, watching his every gesture. At his movement they started guiltily and averted their heads.

"What was Mrs. French's first name?" Queen questioned the group; and as if each one had been addressed individually, there was an instant chorus of "Winifred!"

"Winifred, eh?" muttered the old man, letting his eyes return fleetingly to the body. Then he fixed Weaver with his grey eyes.

"Winifred, eh?" he repeated. Weaver bobbed his head mechanically. He seemed horrified at the wisp of silk in the Inspector's hand. "Winifred what? Any middle name or initials?"

"Winifred—Winifred Marchbanks French," stammered the secretary.

The Inspector nodded curtly. Rising, he strode over to Cyrus French, who was watching him with dull, uncomprehending eyes.

"Mr. French—" Queen shook the millionaire's shoulder gently—"Mr. French, is this your wife's scarf?" He held the scarf up before French's eyes. "Do you understand me, sir? Is this scarf Mrs. French's?"

"Eh? I— Let me see it!" The old man snatched it in a sort of frenzy from the Inspector's hand. He bent over it avidly, pulled it smooth, examined the monogram with feverish fingers—and slumped back in his chair.

"Is it, Mr. French?" pursued the Inspector, taking the scarf from him.

"No." It was a flat, colorless, indifferent negative.

The Inspector turned toward the silent group. "Can any one here identify this scarf?" He held it high. There was no answer. The Inspector repeated his question, glaring at each one individually. Of them all, only Westley Weaver averted his glance.

"So! Weaver, eh? No nonsense, now, young man!" snapped Queen, grasping the secretary by the arm. "What do the letters *M.F.* stand for—Marion French?"

The young man gulped, sent an agonized glance toward Ellery, who returned the glance commiseratingly, looked at old Cyrus French, who was mumbling to himself. . . .

"You can't believe she had anything to do—to do with it!" cried Weaver, shaking his arm free. "It's absurd—crazy! . . . You *can't* believe she had anything to do with this, Inspector. She's too fine, too young, too—"

"Marion French." The Inspector turned toward John Gray. "Mr. French's daughter, I believe Mr. Weaver said before?"

Gray nodded sullenly. Cyrus French suddenly attempted to leap from his chair. He uttered a hoarse cry. "My God, no! Not Marion! Not Marion!" His eyes blazed as Gray and Marchbanks, the directors nearest the old man, jumped to support his quivering body. The spasm lasted for a brief moment; he collapsed into his chair.

Inspector Queen returned without a word to his examination of the dead woman. Ellery had been a silent witness of the little drama, his sharp eyes flitting from face to face as it unfolded. Now he sent a glance of reassurance at Weaver, who was leaning abjectly against a table, and then stooped to pick up an object from the floor which was almost hidden by the dead woman's tumbled skirt.

It was a small handbag of dark brown suède, monogrammed with the initials *W.M.F.* Ellery sat down on

the edge of the bed and turned the bag over in his hands. Curiously he lifted the flap and began to spread the contents of the bag on the mattress. He removed a small change-purse, a gold vanity-case, a lace handkerchief, a gold card-case, all monogrammed W.M.F., and finally a silver-chased lipstick.

The Inspector looked up. "What's that you have there?" he asked sharply.

"Bag of the deceased," murmured Ellery. "Would you care to examine it?"

"Would I—" The Inspector glared at his son in mock heat. "Ellery, sometimes you try me beyond patience!"

Ellery handed it over with a smile. The old man examined the bag minutely. He pawed over the articles on the bed and gave up in disgust.

"Nothing there that I can see," he snorted. "And I'm—"

"No?" Ellery's tone was provocative.

"What do you mean?" asked his father with a change of tone, looking back at the contents of the bag. "Purse, vanity, hanky, card-case, lipstick—what's interesting there?"

Ellery faced about squarely so that his back hid the articles on the bed from the observation of the others. He picked up the lipstick with care and offered it to his father. The old man took it cautiously, suspiciously. Suddenly an exclamation escaped him.

"Exactly—C," murmured Ellery. "What do you make of it?"

The lipstick was large and deep. On the cap was a chastely engraved initial, C. The Inspector peered at it in some astonishment and made as if to question the men in the room. But Ellery halted him with a warning gesture and took the lipstick from his father's fingers. He unscrewed the initialed cap and twisted the body of the stick

until a half-inch of red paste was visible above the orifice. His eyes shifted toward the dead woman's face. They brightened at what they saw.

He knelt quickly by his father's side, their bodies still shielding their movements from the eyes of the onlookers.

"Have a peep at this, dad," he said in an undertone, offering the lipstick. The old man looked at it in a puzzled way.

"Poisoned?" he asked. "But that's impossible—how could you tell without an analysis?"

"No, no!" exclaimed Ellery in the same low tone. "The color, dad—the color!"

The Inspector's face lightened. He looked from the stick in Ellery's hand to the dead woman's lips. The fact was self-evident—the coloring on the lips had not come from the stick in Ellery's possession. The lips were painted a light shade of red, almost pink, whereas the stick itself was a dark carmine in shade.

"Here, El—let me have that!" said the Inspector. He took the open stick and swiftly made a red mark on the dead woman's face.

"Different, all right," he muttered. He wiped off the smudge with a corner of the sheet. "But I don't see—"

"There really should be another lipstick, eh?" remarked Ellery lightly, standing up.

The old man snatched at the woman's handbag and went through it once more, hurriedly. No, there was no sign of another lipstick. He motioned to the detective Johnson.

"Find anything in the bed or the closet here, Johnson?"

"Not a thing, Chief."

"Sure? No sign of a lipstick?"

"Nope."

"Piggott! Hesse! Flint!" The three detectives stopped short in their search of the room and crossed to the Inspector's side. The old man repeated his questions. . . .

Nothing. The detectives had found no alien articles in the room.

"Is Crouther here? Crouther!" The store detective hurried over.

"Been out seeing that things were moving in the store," he announced unasked. "Everything's shipshape—boys've been hustling, that's a fact.—What can I do for you, Inspector?"

"Did you see a lipstick around here when you found the body?"

"Lipstick? No, sir! Wouldn't have touched it if I'd seen it anyway. Told everybody to leave things alone. I know that much, Inspector!"

"Mr. Lavery!" The Frenchman sauntered up. No, he had seen no sign of a lipstick. Perhaps the Negress—?

"Hardly! Piggott, send some one up to the infirmary and find out if this Johnson girl saw it."

The Inspector turned back to Ellery with a frowning brow. "Now, that's funny, isn't it, Ellery? Could some one here have appropriated the darned thing?"

Ellery smiled. "'Honest labor,' as old Tom Dekker had it, 'bears a lovely face,' but I'm very much afraid, dad. . . . No, your efforts in the direction of finding a lipstick thief are wasted. I could almost make a nice conjecture. . . ."

"What *do* you mean, Ellery?" groaned the Inspector. "Where is it, then, if no one took it?"

"We'll come to that in the course of inexorable time," said Ellery imperturbably. "But examine the face of our poor clay again, dad—particularly the labial portion. See anything interesting aside from the color of the lipstick?"

"Eh?" The Inspector turned startled eyes to the corpse. He felt for his snuff-box and nervously took a generous pinch. "No, I can't say that I— By jiminy!" He muttered beneath his breath. "The lips—unfinished. . . ."

"Precisely." Ellery twirled his pince-nez about his finger. "Observed the phenomenon the moment I looked at the body. What amazing juxtaposition of circumstances could have caused a handsome woman still in her prime to leave her lips only half painted?" He pursed his mouth, fell into deep thought. His eyes did not leave the dead woman's lips, which showed the pinkish color of the lipstick on both the upper and lower lip, on the upper two dabs of unsmeared color and on the lower one a dab exactly in the center. Where the lipstick had not yet been smeared, the lips were a sickly purple—the color of unadorned death.

The Inspector passed his hand wearily across his brow just as Piggott returned.

"Well?"

"The colored girl fainted," reported the detective, "just as the body fell out of the wall-bed. Never saw anything, much less a lipstick." Inspector Queen draped the sheet over the body in baffled silence.

8

THE WATCHER

The door opened and Sergeant Velie entered, accompanied by a steady-eyed man dressed in black. This newcomer saluted the Inspector respectfully and stood waiting.

"This is Robert Jones, Inspector," said Velie in his deep clipped tones. "Attached to the store force, and I'll vouch for him personally. Jones was the man called by Mr. Weaver this morning to stand outside the apartment door during the directors' meeting."

"How about it, Jones?" asked Inspector Queen.

"I was ordered to Mr. French's apartment this morning at eleven," replied the store detective. "I was told to stand guard outside and see that no one disturbed the meeting. According to my instructions. . . ."

"And where did your instructions come from?"

"I understood that Mr. Weaver had 'phoned, sir," replied Jones. The Inspector looked at Weaver, who nodded, and then motioned the man to continue.

"According to my instructions," said Jones, "I strolled about outside the apartment without interrupting the meeting. I was in the sixth floor corridor near the apartment until about twelve-fifteen. At that time the door opened and Mr. French, the other directors and Mr. Weaver ran out and took the elevator, going downstairs. They all seemed excited. . . ."

"Did you know why Mr. French, Mr. Weaver and the others ran out of the apartment that way?"

"No, sir. As I said, they seemed excited and paid no attention to me. I didn't hear about Mrs. French being dead until one of the boys dropped by about a half-hour later with the news."

"Did the directors close the door when they left the apartment?"

"The door closed by itself—swung shut."

"So you didn't enter the apartment?"

"No, sir!"

"Did any one come up to the apartment while you stood guard this morning?"

"Not a soul, Inspector. And after the directors left, there was no one except the chap I told you about, who merely spilled his story and went right down again. I've been on duty until five minutes ago, when Sergeant Velie had two of his own men relieve me."

The Inspector mused. "And you're certain no one went into the apartment, Jones? It may be quite important."

"Dead certain, Inspector," replied Jones clearly. "The reason I stayed on after the directors left was because I didn't know exactly what to do under the circumstances,

and I've always found it a safe bet to stand pat when something unusual happens."

"Good enough, Jones!" said the Inspector. "That's all."

Jones saluted, went up to Crouther and asked what he was to do. The head store detective, his chest held high, detailed him to help handle the crowds in the store. And Jones departed.

9

THE WATCHERS

The Inspector went quickly to the door and peered over the heads of the seething crowds on the main floor.

"MacKenzie! Is MacKenzie there?" he shouted.

"Right here!" came the faint bellow of the store manager's voice. "Coming!"

Queen trotted back into the room, fumbling for his snuff-box. He eyed the directors almost roguishly; his good humor seemed for the moment to have returned. The occupants of the room, with the exception of Cyrus French, who was still plunged in a deep lethargy of grief and indifference to what was going on, had by this time shaken off some of their horror and were growing restless. Zorn stole surreptitious glances at his heavy gold watch; Marchbanks was pacing belligerently up and down the room; Trask at regular intervals averted his head and gulped down some whisky from a flask in his pocket; Gray, his face as ashen as his hair, stood in silence behind old French's chair. Lavery was very quiet, watching with bright inquisitive eyes the least movement of the Inspector and his men. Weaver, his boyish face strained and lined, seemed to be enduring agonies. He frequently sought Ellery with pleading eyes, as if asking for help which he knew, instinctively, could not be forthcoming.

"I must ask you to have patience for a short time longer,

gentlemen," said the Inspector, smoothing his mustache with the back of his small hand. "We have a few things more to do here—and then we'll see. . . . Ah! You're MacKenzie, I take it? Are those the watchmen? Bring 'em in, man!"

The middle-aged Scotchman had entered the window-room, herding before him four oldish men with frightened faces and fidgety hands. Ritter made up the rear.

"Yes, Inspector. By the way, I'm having the employees checked up, as Sergeant Velie instructed me to." MacKenzie waved the four men forward. They shuffled a step farther into the room, reluctantly.

"Who's the head night-watchman among you?" demanded the Inspector.

A corpulent old man with fleshy features and placid eyes stepped forward, touching his forehead.

"I am, sor—Peter O'Flaherty's me name."

"Were you on duty last night, O'Flaherty?"

"Yes, sor. That I was."

"What time did you go on?"

"Me reg'lar hour, sor," said the watchman. "Ha'past five. It's O'Shane I relieve at th' desk in the night-office on th' 39th Street side. These boys here"—he indicated the three men behind him with a fat and calloused forefinger—"they come on with me. They was with me last night, reg'lar."

"I see." The Inspector paused. "O'Flaherty, do you know what has happened?"

"Yes, sor. I've been told. And a shame it is, sor," responded O'Flaherty soberly. He stole a glance at the limp figure of Cyrus French, then jerked his head back toward the Inspector as if he had committed an indiscretion. His cronies followed his gaze, and looked forward again in exactly the same manner.

"Did you know Mrs. French by sight?" asked the Inspector, his keen little eyes studying the old man.

"I did, sor," replied O'Flaherty. "She used to come to th' store sometimes after closing when Mr. French was still here."

"Often?"

"No, sor. Not so very. But I knowed her right enough, sor."

"Hmmm." Inspector Queen relaxed. "Now, O'Flaherty, answer carefully—and truthfully. As truthfully as if you were on the witness-stand.—Did you see Mrs. French last night?"

Silence had fallen in the room—a silence pregnant with beating hearts and racing pulses. All eyes were on the broad mottled face of the old watchman. He licked his lips, seemed to reflect, squared his shoulders.

"Yes, sor," he said, with a little hiss.

"At what time?"

"'Twas just eleven forty-five, sor," replied O'Flaherty. "'Y'see, there ain't but one night entrance to th' store after hours. All th' other doors and exits are ironed up. That one door is on 39th Street, th' Employees' Entrance. There ain't no way but that t'get in or out o' the buildin'. I—"

Ellery moved suddenly, and everybody turned toward him. He smiled deprecatingly at O'Flaherty. "Sorry, dad, but I've just thought of something. . . . O'Flaherty, do I understand you to say that there is only one way into the store after hours—the Employees' Entrance?"

O'Flaherty champed his blue old jaws reflectively. "Why, yes, sor," he said. "And what's wrong about that?"

"Very little," smiled Ellery, "except that I believe there is a night freight-entrance on the 39th Street side as well. . . ."

"Oh, that!" snorted the old watchman. "'Tain't hardly an entrance, sor. Mostly always shut. So, as I was sayin'—"

Ellery lifted a slender hand. "One moment, O'Flaherty. You say, 'Mostly always shut.' Just what do you mean by that?"

"Well," replied O'Flaherty, scratching his poll, "it's shut down tighter'n a drum all night exceptin' between eleven o'clock and eleven-thirty. So it don't hardly count."

"That's *your* point of view," said Ellery argumentatively. "I thought there must be a good reason for having a special nightwatchman at the spot all night. Who is he?"

"That's Bloom over here," said O'Flaherty. "Bloom, step out, man, and let the gentlemen look ye over."

Bloom, a sturdy middle-aged man with reddish, graying hair, stepped uncertainly forward. "That's me," he said. "Nothin' wrong in my freight department last night, if that's what you wanna know. . . ."

"No?" Ellery eyed him keenly. "Exactly why is the freight-entrance opened between eleven and eleven-thirty?"

"Fer the delivery of groceries an' meats an' such," answered Bloom. "Big turn-over every day in the store restaurant, and then there's the Employees' Restaurant too. Get supplies fresh every night."

"Who is the trucker?" interrupted the Inspector.

"Buckley & Green. Same driver an' unloader every night, sir."

"I see," said the Inspector. "Get it down, Hagstrom, and make a note to question the men on the truck. . . . Anything else, Ellery?"

"Yes." Ellery turned once more to the red-haired night-watchman. "Tell us just what happens every night when the Buckley & Green truck arrives."

"Well, I go on duty at ten," said Bloom. "At eleven every night the truck rolls up and Johnny Salvatore, the

driver, rings the night bell outside the freight door. . . ."

"Is the freight door kept locked after five-thirty?"

MacKenzie, the store manager, interrupted. "Yes, sir. It's automatically locked at closing-time. Never opened till the truck comes up at eleven."

"Go on, Bloom."

"When Johnny rings, I unlock the door—it's sheet iron—and roll 'er up. Then the truck drives inside, an' Marino, the unloader, unpacks the stuff and stores it, while Johnny and myself check it over in my booth near the door. That's all. When they're through, they take the truck out, I unroll the door, and lock it, and just stay there all night."

Ellery pondered. "Does the door remain open while the truck is being unloaded?"

"Sure," said Bloom. "It's only for a half an hour, and besides, nobody could hardly get in without one of us seeing 'em."

"You're sure of that?" asked Ellery sharply. "Positive? Swear to it, man?"

Bloom hesitated. "Well, I don't hardly see how anybody *could*," he said lamely. "Marino's out there unloading, and Johnny and me in the booth right by the door. . . ."

"How many electric lights are there in this freight room?" demanded Ellery.

Bloom looked bewildered. "Why, there's one big light right over where the truck is, and then there's a small one in my booth. Johnny keeps his headlights on, too."

"How big is this freight room?"

"Oh, about seventy-five foot deep by fifty wide. Store emergency trucks are parked there for the night, too."

"How far from your booth does the truck unload?"

"Oh, 'way in, near the back, where there's a chute from the kitchen."

"And one light in all that black expanse," murmured Ellery. "The booth is enclosed, I suppose?"

"Just a glass window facing the inside of the room."

Ellery played with his pince-nez. "Bloom, if I told you to swear that nobody could get into that freight room, past the entrance, without your seeing him, would you do it?"

Bloom smiled in a sickly fashion. "Well, sir," he said, "I don't know as I would."

"Did you see anybody get in last night while the door was open and you and Salvatore were in the booth checking over the goods?"

"No, sir!"

"But somebody might have got in?"

"I—I guess so. . . ."

"One question more," said Ellery genially. "These deliveries are made *every night*, without fail, and at exactly the same hour?"

"Yes, sir. Been that way as long as I can remember."

"Another, if you'll pardon me. Did you lock that freight door last night promptly at eleven-thirty?"

"To the dot."

"Were you at that door all night?"

"Yes, sir. On my chair, right by the door."

"No disturbance? Didn't hear or see anything suspicious?"

"No, sir."

"If—any one—tried—to—get—out—of—the—building—by—that—door," said Ellery with startling emphasis, "you would have heard and seen him?"

"Sure thing, sir," said Bloom weakly, glancing with despair at MacKenzie.

"Very well, then," drawled Ellery, waving his arm negligently toward Bloom, "the inquisition may proceed,

Inspector.” And he stepped back, making furious notes in his book.

The Inspector, who had been listening with a gradually clarifying expression on his face, sighed and said to O’Flaherty, “You were saying that Mrs. French came into the building at eleven-forty-five, O’Flaherty. Let’s have the rest of it.”

The head nightwatchman wiped his brow with a slightly shaking hand and a dubious glance in Ellery’s direction. Then he took up the thread of his story. “Well, I sits at th’ night-desk all night—never gets up, while Ralska and Powers here does the rounds every hour. That’s me job, sor—an’ besides I check out all those who put in overtime, like th’ executive people, and such. Yes, sor. I—”

“Easy, O’Flaherty,” said the Inspector, with interest. “Tell us just exactly what happened when Mrs. French arrived. You’re sure it was eleven-forty-five?”

“Yes, sor. I looked at th’ time-clock next th’ desk, ’cause I gotta put down all arrivals on me time-sheet. . . .”

“Oh, the time-sheet?” muttered Queen. “Mr. MacKenzie, will you please see that I get last night’s time-sheet at once? Even before the report on the employees.” MacKenzie nodded and left. “All right, O’Flaherty. Go on.”

“Well, sor, through the night-door acrost th’ hall I sees a taxi roll up and Mrs. French she steps out. She pays th’ driver and knocks. I sees who ’tis and opens quick. She gives me a cheery good-evenin’, and asks if Mr. Cyrus French was still in th’ buildin’. I says no, ma’am, Mr. Cyrus French’d left early in th’ afternoon, as he had, sor, carryin’ a brief-case. She thanks me, stops to think a bit, then she says she’ll go up to Mr. French’s private apartment anyway, and starts to walk out o’ th’ office toward the private elevator that’s only used to go up to th’ apartment. I says to her, I says, Kin I get one o’ the boys to run th’

elevator up for her an' open th' apartment door? She says no thanks, right polite, sor, and rummages in her bag for a minute, as if to see she's got her key. Yes, she had it—she fishes it out o' her bag and shows it to me. Then she—”

“Just a moment, O'Flaherty.” The Inspector seemed perturbed. “You say she had a key to the apartment? How is that, do you know?”

“Well, sor, there're only a certain number o' keys to Mr. French's apartment, sor,” answered O'Flaherty, more comfortably. “S'far as I know, Mr. Cyrus French has one, Mrs. French had one, Miss Marion has one, Miss Bernice has one—me workin' here for seventeen years, I knows th' fam'ly right well, sor—Mr. Weaver has one, and there's one master-key in th' desk in my office all th' time. That's half a dozen altogether, sor. Th' master-key is in case a key is needed in an emergency.”

“You say Mrs. French showed you her key before she left your office, O'Flaherty? How do you know it was the key to the apartment?” asked the Inspector.

“Easy enough, sor. Y'see, each key—they're special Yales, sor—each key has a little gold dingus on it with th' initials o' the person it belongs to. Th' key Mrs. French showed me had that on. Besides, I know th' looks o' that key; it was the right one, all right.”

“One second, O'Flaherty.” The Inspector turned to Weaver. “Have you your apartment-key on you, Weaver? Let me have it, please?”

Weaver extracted a leather key-case from his vest-pocket and handed it to Queen. Among a number of different keys was one with a small gold disc fused into the tiny hole at the top. On this disc were engraved the initials, W.W. The Inspector looked up at O'Flaherty.

“A key like this?”

“Just th' same, sor,” said O'Flaherty, “exceptin' th' initials.”

"Very well." Queen returned the key-case to Weaver. "Now, O'Flaherty, before you continue, tell me this—where do you keep your master-key to the apartment?"

"Right in a special drawer in th' desk, sor. It's there all the time, day and night."

"Was it in its place last night?"

"Yes, sor. I always looks for it special. It was there—the right key, no mistake, sor. It's got a tab on it too, with th' word 'Master' on it."

"O'Flaherty," asked the Inspector quietly, "were you at your desk all night? Did you leave your office at all?"

"No, sor!" answered the old watchman emphatically. "From th' minute I got there, at five-thirty, I didn't leave th' office until I was relieved this mornin' by O'Shane at eight-thirty. I got longer hours than him 'cause he's got more to do on his shift, with checkin' in employees and all. And as for leavin' the desk, I brings me own feed from home, even hot coffee in a thermos bottle. No, sor, I was on th' watch all night."

"I see." Queen shook his head as if to clear the mists of weariness and motioned the watchman to continue with his story.

"Well, sor," said O'Flaherty, "when Mrs. French left me office, I got up out o' me chair, went into the hall, and watched her. She went to th' elevator, opened th' door, an' went in. That's the last I saw o' her, sor. When I saw she didn't come down I thought nothin' of it, 'cause a number o' times Mrs. French has stayed overnight in Mr. French's apartment upstairs. I thought she'd done th' same this night. So that's all I know, sor."

Ellery stirred. He lifted the dead woman's handbag from the bed and dangled it before the watchman's eyes.

"O'Flaherty," he asked in a drawling voice, "have you ever seen this before?"

The watchman replied, "Yes, sor! That's th' bag Mrs. French was carryin' last night."

"The bag, then," pursued Ellery softly, "from which she took her gold-topped key?"

The watchman seemed puzzled. "Why, yes, sor." Ellery seemed satisfied and dropped back to whisper in his father's ear. The Inspector frowned, then nodded. He turned to Crouther.

"Crouther, will you please get the master-key in the office on the 39th Street side." Crouther grunted cheerfully and departed. "Now then." The Inspector picked up the gauzy scarf initialed *M.F.* which he had found on the dead body. "O'Flaherty, do you recall Mrs. French's having worn this last night? Think carefully."

O'Flaherty took the wisp of silk in his horny fat fingers and turned it over and over, his forehead wrinkled. "Well, sor," he said finally, in a hesitant tone, "I can't rightly say. Seemed to me for a minute as if I'd seen Mrs. French wear it, and then again seemed as if I hadn't. No, I couldn't rightly say. No, sor," and he returned it to the Inspector with a gesture of helplessness.

"You're not sure?" The Inspector dropped the scarf back on the bed. "Everything seem all right last night? No alarms?"

"No, sor. O' course you know th' store's wired against burglars. Quiet as a church last night. S'far as I know, nothin' happened out o' th' way."

Queen said to Sergeant Velie: "Thomas, call up the alarm central office and find out if they've a report on last night. Probably not, or we'd have heard from them by this time." Velie left, silently as usual.

"O'Flaherty, did you see any one else enter the building last night except Mrs. French? At any time during the night?" continued the Inspector.

"No, sor, absolutely not. Not a soul." O'Flaherty

seemed anxious to make this point clear, after his defection concerning the scarf.

"Ah there, MacKenzie! Let me have the time-sheet, please." Queen took from the store manager, who had just returned, a long scroll of ruled paper. He looked it over hurriedly. Something seemed to catch his eye.

"I see by your sheet, O'Flaherty," he said, "that Mr. Weaver and a Mr. Springer were the last to leave the store yesterday evening? Did you make these notations?"

"Yes, sor. Mr. Springer went out about a quarter to seven, and Mr. Weaver a few minutes after."

"Is that right, Weaver?" demanded the Inspector, turning to the secretary.

"Yes," replied Weaver in a colorless tone. "I stayed a little later last night to prepare some papers for Mr. French to-day; I believe I shaved. . . . I left a little before seven."

"Who is this Springer?"

"Oh, James Springer is the head of our Book Department, Inspector," put in mild-mannered MacKenzie. "Often stays late. A very conscientious man, sir."

"Yes, yes. Now—you men!" The Inspector pointed to the two watchmen who had not yet spoken. "Anything to say? Anything to add to O'Flaherty's story? One at a time. . . . Your name?"

One of the watchmen cleared his throat nervously. "George Powers, Inspector. No, sir, I got nothin' to say."

"Everything all right when you went your rounds? Do you cover this part of the store?"

"Yes, sir, everythin' was okay on my rounds. No, sir, I don't cover the main floor. That's Ralska's job, here."

"Ralska, eh? What's your first name, Ralska?" demanded the Inspector.

The third watchman expelled his breath noisily. "Hermann, sir. Hermann Ralska. I think—"

"You think, eh?" Queen turned. "Hagstrom, you're taking this down, of course?"

"Yep, Chief," grinned the detective, his pencil busy in his notebook.

"Now, Ralska, you were about to think something, no doubt very important," snarled the Inspector. His temper seemed frayed and raw once more. "What was it?"

Ralska held himself stiffly. "I thought I heard somethin' funny last night on the main floor."

"Oh, you did! Where, exactly?"

"Right about here—outside this window-room."

"No!" Inspector Queen grew very quiet. "Outside this window-room. Very good, Ralska. What was it?"

The watchman seemed to take heart at Queen's calmer tone. "It was just about one o'clock in the morning. Maybe a few minutes earlier. I was in the part of the store near the Fift' Avenue and 39t' Street side. This here window faces Fift' Avenue, past the night-office, so it's a good distance away. I heard a queer kind o' noise. Can't make up my mind what it was. Might 'a' been some one movin' around, might 'a' been a footstep, might 'a' been a door closin'—just don't know. Anyway, I wasn't suspicious or anything—you get so you hear noises that never happened on a night job like this. . . . But I went over in that direction and couldn't see anything wrong, so I thought it must be my imagination. Even tried a couple of the window doors. But they were all locked. Tried this one, too. So I stopped in to have a word with O'Flaherty here, and went on ahead, with my rounds. That's all."

"Oh!" Inspector Queen seemed disappointed. "So you're not certain of where the noise came from—if there was a noise?"

"Well," responded Ralska carefully, "if it was anythin'

at all it came from this section o' the floor near these big street-window displays."

"Nothing else all night?"

"No, sir."

"All right, that's all for you four men. You may go back home and catch up on your sleep. Be back here to-night for work as usual."

"Yes, sir; yes, sir." The watchmen backed out of the window-room and disappeared.

The Inspector, brandishing the time-sheet in his hand, addressed the store manager. "MacKenzie, have you given this sheet any study?"

The Scotchman replied, "Yes, Inspector—thought you might be interested and looked it over on the way."

"Fine! MacKenzie, what's the verdict? Was every employee of the store checked out regularly yesterday?" Queen's face was composed, indifferent.

MacKenzie did not hesitate. "As you can see, we have a simple check-out system—by departments. . . . I can certainly assert that every *employee* who was *in the store* yesterday checked out."

"Does that include executives and gentlemen like the Board of Directors?"

"Yes, sir—there are their names in the proper places."

"Very well—thank you," said the Inspector thoughtfully. "Please don't forget that list of absentees, MacKenzie."

Velie and Crouther at this point reëntered the room together. Crouther handed the Inspector a key, an exact replica of the one in Weaver's possession, marked "Master" on its gold disk as O'Flaherty had averred. The detective-sergeant relayed a negative report from the burglar-alarm company. Nothing unusual had occurred during the night.

The Inspector turned again to MacKenzie. "How reliable is this O'Flaherty?"

"True-blue. Would give his life for Mr. French, Inspector," returned MacKenzie warmly. "He's the oldest employee of the store—knew Mr. French in the old days."

"That's a fact," echoed Crouther, as if anxious to have his opinion considered as well.

"It has just occurred to me. . . ." Inspector Queen faced MacKenzie inquiringly. "Just how private is Mr. French's apartment? Who has access to it besides the French family and Mr. Weaver?"

MacKenzie scraped his jaw slowly. "Hardly any one else, Inspector," he replied. "Of course, the Board of Directors meet in Mr. French's apartment periodically for conferences and other business matters; but the only keys to it are in the possession of the people O'Flaherty has mentioned. As a matter of fact, it's almost peculiar how little we people know about Mr. French's apartment. In all my association with the store, and it's a matter of ten years or so, I can't recall having been in the apartment more than half a dozen times. I was thinking that only last week, when Mr. French summoned me there for some special instructions regarding the store. As for other employees—well, Mr. French has always been adamant in the matter of his privacy. Aside from O'Flaherty opening the door for the cleaning-woman three times a week, and letting her out just before he goes off duty, there's not an employee of the store who has access or occasion to visit the apartment."

"I see, I see. The apartment—we seem to be going back to that apartment," muttered the Inspector. "Well! There seems to be very little left here. . . . Ellery, what do you think?"

Ellery swung his pince-nez with unaccustomed vigor as

he regarded his father. There was a troubled glint in the depths of his eyes.

"Think? Think?" He smiled fretfully. "My ratiocinative machinery has been chiefly occupied in the last half-hour or so with a stubborn little problem." He bit his lip.

"Problem? What problem?" growled his father affectionately. "I haven't had a moment to think clearly, and you talk of problems!"

"The problem," enunciated Ellery distinctly but not loudly enough to be heard by the others, "of why Mrs. French's key to her husband's apartment is missing."

10

MARION

"Not much of a problem," said Inspector Queen. "There is no particular reason for expecting to find the key—here. Besides, I can't see that it's of much importance."

"*Alors*—we'll let it go at that," said Ellery, smiling. "I am always worried by omissions." He dropped back, searching his vest-pocket for a cigaret-case. His father eyed him sharply. Ellery rarely smoked.

A policeman pushed open the window-door at this moment and lumbered over to the Inspector. "Young lady outside giving the name of Marion French. Says she wants Mr. Weaver," he whispered hoarsely. "Scared to death at the mobs and the cops. One o' the floorwalkers is with her. What'll I do, Inspector?"

The Inspector's eyes narrowed. He shot a glance at Weaver. The secretary seemed to sense the import of the message, although he had not heard the whispered words; for he stepped forward at once.

"I beg your pardon, Inspector," he said eagerly, "but if

that's Miss French I'd like your permission to go to her at once and—"

"Amazing intuition!" cried the Inspector suddenly, his white face creasing into smiles. "Yes, I think I— Come along, Mr. Weaver. You shall introduce me to Mr. French's daughter." He turned sharply to Velie. "Carry on for a moment, Thomas. No one is to leave. I'll be back in a jiffy."

Preceded by a revitalized Weaver, he trotted out of the window-room.

Weaver broke into a run as they stepped out onto the main floor. The center of a little crowd of detectives and policemen, a young girl stood stiffly, her face drained of color, eyes wild with a nameless fear. As she caught sight of Weaver, a tremulous cry escaped her and she swayed forward weakly.

"Westley! What is the matter? These policemen—detectives—" Her arms stretched out. In full sight of the grinning police and the Inspector, Weaver and the girl embraced.

"Sweetheart! You must get hold of yourself. . . ." Weaver whispered desperately into the girl's ear as she clung to him.

"Wes—tell me. Who is it? Not—" She drew away from him with horror in her eyes. "Not—Winifred?"

She read the answer in his eyes even before he nodded.

The Inspector obtruded his elastic little figure between them. "Mr. Weaver," he smiled, "may I have the pleasure . . . ?"

"Oh, yes—yes!" Weaver stepped quickly backward, releasing the girl. He seemed astonished at the interruption, as if he had forgotten momentarily the place, the circumstances, the time. . . . "Marion dear, may I present Inspector Richard Queen. Inspector—Miss French."

Queen took the proffered little hand and bowed. Marion

murmured a perfunctory pleasance, while her large grey eyes widened in stricken interest at this tiny middle-aged gentleman with the clean white mustache who bent over her hand.

"You're investigating—a crime, Inspector Queen?" she faltered, shrinking from him, clutching at Weaver's hand.

"Unfortunately, Miss French," said the Inspector. "I'm genuinely grieved that you've had such an unpleasant reception—more than I can say. . . ." Weaver glared at him in bewildered wrath. The old Machiavelli! He had known all along what would happen! . . . The Inspector proceeded in a gentle tone. "It's your stepmother, my dear—shockingly murdered. Terrible! Terrible!" He clucked his tongue like a solicitous old hen.

"Murdered!" The girl grew very still. The hand in Weaver's twitched once, and was limp. For the instant both Weaver and the Inspector thought she would faint, and involuntarily moved forward to her aid. She staggered back. "No—thank you," she whispered. "My God—Winifred! And she and Bernice were away—all night. . . ."

The Inspector stiffened. Then his hand fumbled for his snuff-box. "Bernice, I believe you said, Miss French?" he said. "The watchman mentioned that name before, too. . . . A sister, perhaps, my dear?" he asked ingratiatingly.

"Oh—what have I— Oh, Wes dear, take me away, take me away!" She buried her face in the folds of Weaver's coat.

Weaver said, above her head, "A perfectly natural remark, Inspector. The housekeeper, Hortense Underhill, called Mr. French this morning during the conference to report that neither Mrs. French nor Bernice, her daughter, had slept at home. . . . You see, of course, that Marion—Miss French. . . ."

"Yes, yes, naturally." Queen smiled, touched the girl's arm. She started convulsively. "If you'll come this way, Miss French—? Please be brave. There is something I want you—to see."

He waited. Weaver gave him an outraged glance, but pressed the girl's arm encouragingly and led her, stumbling, toward the window. The Inspector followed, beckoning to one of the detectives nearby, who immediately took his place outside the window-door after the trio entered the room.

There was a little rustle of excitement as Weaver helped the girl into the room. Even old French, shaking as if with ague, showed a light of reason in his eyes as he spied her.

"Marion my dear!" he cried in a terrible voice.

She broke away from Weaver and fell on her knees before her father's chair. No one spoke. The men looked uneasily away. Father and daughter clung to each other. . . .

For the first time since he had come into the chamber of death, Marchbanks, brother of the dead woman, spoke.

"This—is—hellish," he said, savagely and slowly, glaring out of bloodshot eyes at the trim figure of the Inspector. Ellery, in his corner, crooked his body slightly forward. "I'm—getting—out—of—this."

The Inspector signaled to Velie. The burly Sergeant stumped across the floor and towered above Marchbanks, saying nothing, his arms hanging loosely by his sides. Marchbanks, large and corpulent, shrank before the huge detective. He flushed, muttered beneath his breath, stepped back.

"Now," said the Inspector equably, "Miss French, may I trouble you to answer a few questions?"

"Oh, I say, Inspector," protested Weaver, despite Ellery's warning flick of the finger, "do you think it absolutely necessary to—"

"I'm quite ready, sir," came the quiet voice of the girl, and she rose to her feet, her eyes a trifle red, but clearly composed. Her father had slumped back in his chair. He had forgotten her already. She smiled wanly at Weaver, who sent her an ardent glance across the room. But she kept her head averted from the sheeted corpse in the corner by the bed.

"Miss French," snapped the Inspector, flicking the gauzy scarf from the dead woman's clothes before her eyes, "is this your scarf?"

She whitened. "Yes. How does it come here?"

"That," said the Inspector dispassionately, "is what I should like to know. Can you explain its presence?"

The girl's eyes flashed, but she spoke calmly enough. "No, sir, I cannot."

"Miss French," went on the Inspector after a stifling pause, "your scarf was found around Mrs. French's neck, under her coat-collar. Does that convey anything to you—perhaps suggest an explanation?"

"She was wearing it?" Marion gasped. "I—I can't understand it. She—she never did that before." She glanced helplessly at Weaver, shifted her gaze and met Ellery's eyes.

They looked at each other for a startled moment. Ellery saw a slender girl with smoky hair and deep grey eyes. There was an unaccented cleanliness about the lines of her young body that made him feel pleased for Weaver's sake. She gave the impression of straightforwardness and strength of will—honest eyes, firm lips, small strong hands, a pleasingly cleft chin and a good straight nose. Ellery smiled.

Marion saw a tall athletic man with a suggestion of nascent vigor, startlingly intellectual about the forehead and lips, cool and quiet and composed. He looked thirty, but was younger. There was a hint of Bond Street about his clothes. His long thin fingers clasped a little book and

he regarded her out of pince-nez eyeglasses. . . . Then she blushed slightly and her eyes wavered away toward the Inspector.

"When did you last see this scarf, Miss French?" went on the old man.

"Oh, I—" Her tone changed; she took command of herself. "I seem to remember wearing it yesterday," she said slowly.

"Yesterday? Very interesting, Miss French. Do you recall just where—?"

"I left the house directly after luncheon," she said, "wearing the scarf under this coat. I met a friend at Carnegie Hall and we spent the afternoon at a recital—Pasternak the pianist. We parted after the recital and I took a 'bus down to the store. I do seem to remember wearing the scarf all day. . . ." Her brow wrinkled prettily. "I don't remember having it, however, when I returned home."

"You say you came to the store, Miss French?" interrupted the Inspector politely. "For any special reason?"

"Why—not particularly. I did think I might still catch father. I knew he was leaving for Great Neck, but I didn't know exactly when, and—"

The Inspector held up a ridiculously tiny white hand. "Just a moment, Miss French. You say your father went to Great Neck yesterday?"

"Why, yes. I understood he was to go out there for business. There's—there's nothing wrong—about that, is there, sir?" She bit her lip.

"No, no—positively no!" said the Inspector, smiling. He turned to Weaver. "Why didn't you tell me that Mr. French took a little trip yesterday, Mr. Weaver?"

"You didn't ask me," retorted Weaver.

The Inspector started, then chuckled. "One on me," he

said. "It's true enough. When did he return and why did he go?"

Weaver looked compassionately at the limp, oblivious figure of his employer. "He went early yesterday afternoon to confer with Farnham Whitney on Whitney's estate. A matter of merger, Inspector—the meeting this morning discussed just that. Mr. French told me that he was driven into the city early this morning by Whitney's chauffeur—arrived at the store at nine o'clock. Anything else?"

"Not just now." Queen turned to Marion. "Your pardon, my dear, for the interruption. . . . Now where specifically did you go when you came to the store?"

"To my father's apartment on the sixth floor."

"Indeed?" muttered the Inspector. "And why, may I ask, did you go to your father's apartment?"

"I usually go there when I'm at the store, which isn't often," explained Marion. "Besides, I was told that Mr. Weaver was there, working, and I thought—it might be nice to pay him a little visit. . . ." She eyed her father apprehensively, but he was insensible to words.

"You went there directly on entering the store? And left immediately from the apartment?"

"Yes."

"Is it possible," insinuated the Inspector very gently, "that you may have dropped your scarf in the apartment, Miss French?"

She did not reply immediately. Weaver tried frantically to catch her eye, moving his lips, framing the word "No!" She shook her head.

"Quite possible, Inspector," she said quietly.

"I see." The Inspector beamed. "Now, when did you see Mrs. French last?"

"At dinner last night. I had an appointment for the evening and left almost immediately."

"Did Mrs. French seem herself? Notice anything unusual, abnormal in her speech or actions?"

"Well. . . . She did seem worried about Bernice," Marion said slowly.

"Ah!" Queen rubbed his hands together. "Then I infer that your—step-sister, is it?—was not at home for dinner?"

"No," replied Marion after a hesitating silence. "Wini-fred—my step-mother told me that Bernice had gone out and would not be home for dinner. But she seemed worried nevertheless."

"She gave no indication of a reason for this worry?"

"None whatever."

"What is your step-sister's name? Is it French?"

"No, Inspector. She retains her father's name of Carmody," murmured Marion.

"I see. I see." The Inspector stood plunged in thought. John Gray shifted impatiently, whispered a word to Cornelius Zorn, who shook his head sadly and leaned resignedly against the back of French's chair. Queen paid no attention to them. He looked up at Marion. Her passive, tired little figure drooped.

"One question more for the moment, Miss French," he said, "and you may rest. . . . Can you suggest, from anything that you know of Mrs. French's background or affairs, or from anything that transpired recently—last night, yesterday, perhaps—can you suggest," he repeated, "a possible explanation for this crime? It's murder, of course," he continued hastily, before she could reply, "and I know you are naturally chary of answering. Take your time—think carefully over everything that has occurred lately. . . ." He stopped. "Now, Miss French, can you tell me anything I might wish to hear?"

There was naked silence in the room—a raw pulsing quiet that beat invisibly against the atmosphere. Ellery

heard quick breaths drawn, saw bodies tense, eyes sharpen, hands twitch as, to a man, the occupants of the room with the exception of Cyrus French leaned forward, watching Marion French as she stood there, facing them.

But she said, "No," very matter-of-factly, and the Inspector's eyes flickered. Everybody relaxed. Some one sighed. Ellery noted that it was Zorn. Trask lit a cigarette nervously and let the fire die. Marchbanks sat frozen to his chair. Weaver made a little movement of despair. . . .

"Then that will be all, Miss French," returned Inspector Queen, in a tone as casual as the girl's had been. He seemed pleasantly absorbed in a contemplation of Lavery's formal cravat. "Please," he added, just as pleasantly, "do not leave the room. . . . Mr. Lavery, may I have your ear for the moment?"

Marion dropped back and Weaver sprang to her side, dragging a chair with him. She sank into it with a little smile, shading her eyes with a nerveless hand. The other snuggled secretly into Weaver's eager grasp. . . . Ellery watched them for a moment, then turned his sharp eyes on Lavery.

The Frenchman bowed, waited, fingers riffling his short beard.

11

LOOSE ENDS

"As I understand it, Mr. Lavery, you are responsible for this exhibition of modernistic house-furnishings?" Inspector Queen's voice took a fresh note.

"That is correct."

"How long has this exhibition been going on?"

"About a month, I should say."

"Your main exhibition rooms are where?"

"On the fifth floor." Lavery spread his fingers. "You see, this is more or less of a pioneer project in New York,

Inspector. I was invited to exhibit some of my creations to the American public by Mr. French and his Board, who are very much in sympathy with the movement. Most of the purely enterprising details of the present exhibition emanate from Mr. French, allow me to add."

"Just what do you mean?"

Lavery showed his teeth in a smile. "The matter of these window-exhibits, for example. That was wholly Mr. French's idea, and I do suppose it has resulted in much advertising for the establishment. Certainly the crowds have flocked from the sidewalk outside to the fifth floor exhibition rooms in such numbers that we have had to call in special ushers to handle them."

"I see." The Inspector nodded politely. "So these window-exhibits were Mr. French's idea? Yes, yes—you have just told me that. . . . How long has this particular window been dressed so, Mr. Lavery?"

"This is the—let me see—the end of the second week of the living-room-bedroom exhibit," answered Lavery, stroking his short modish beard again. "The fourteenth day, to be exact. To-morrow we were to have changed the room's contents, removed them to make way for a model dining-room."

"Oh, the windows are changed bi-weekly? Then this is the second room you have exhibited?"

"Quite so. The first was a full bedroom."

Queen mused openly. His eyes drooped with weariness; blackish pouches stood out beneath. He took a short turn up and down the room, halting once more before Lavery.

"It seems to me," he said, more to himself than to Lavery, "that this unfortunate accident and its attendant circumstances dovetail too fortuitously. . . . However! Mr. Lavery, is this window-exhibit held at the same time each day?"

Lavery stared. "Yes—yes, certainly."

"At *exactly* the same time each day, Mr. Lavery?" pursued the Inspector.

"Oh, yes!" said Lavery. "The Negress has entered this window at noon of each day ever since the institution of the exhibit."

"Very good!" The Inspector seemed pleased again. "Now, Mr. Lavery—in the month that these demonstrations have taken place, has there ever to your knowledge been one day on which the time-schedule was not adhered to?"

"No," said Lavery with positiveness. "And I am in a position to know, sir. It has been my habit to stand on the main floor behind the window-room during the Negress's demonstration every day. My lecture upstairs is not scheduled until three-thirty of the afternoon, you see."

The Inspector raised his eyebrows. "Oh, you lecture, too, Mr. Lavery?"

"But of course!" cried Lavery. "I have been told," he added gravely, "that my description of the work of the Viennese Hoffman has created something of a stir among the *monde artistique*."

"Indeed!" smiled the Inspector. "One question more, Mr. Lavery, and then I think we will have finished with you for the present.—This exhibition as a whole is not entirely a spontaneous thing? I mean," he added, "steps have been taken to make the public aware both of your window-demonstrations and of your lectures upstairs?"

"Assuredly. The publicity and advertising have been planned most carefully," rejoined Lavery. "We have circularized all the art-schools and allied organizations. The charge-accounts, I understand, have likewise been covered by personal letters from the management. The bulk of the public attention, however, has been secured by means of newspaper advertisements. Of course you have seen those?"

"Well, I rarely read department store ads," the Inspector replied hastily. "And I suppose you have received all sorts of publicity?"

"Yes—yes, indeed," and Lavery again flashed his white teeth. "If you would condescend to examine my scrap-books—"

"Hardly necessary, Mr. Lavery, and thank you for your patience. That's all."

"A moment, please.—May I?" Ellery had stepped forward, smiling. The Inspector glanced at him, waved his hand briefly, as if to say, "Your witness!" and retreated to the bed, where he sat down with a sigh.

Lavery had turned in his tracks and now stood stroking his beard, his eyes politely questioning.

Ellery did not speak for a moment. He twirled his pince-nez, looked up suddenly. "I am quite interested in your work, Mr. Lavery," he said with a disarming grimace. "Although I fear my esthetic studies have not exhausted the field of modern interior decoration. As a matter of fact, I was much interested the other day in your lecture on Bruno Paul. . . ."

"So you attended my impromptu classes upstairs, sir?" exclaimed Lavery, flushing with pleasure. "Perhaps I was a trifle enthusiastic about Paul—I know him quite well, you see. . . ."

"Indeed!" Ellery looked at the floor. "I take it that you have been in America before, Mr. Lavery—your English is quite untouched by Gallicism."

"Well, I have traveled more or less extensively," admitted Lavery. "This is my fifth visit to the States—Mr. Queen, is it?"

"I'm sorry!" said Ellery. "I am Inspector Queen's unruly scion. . . . Mr. Lavery, how many demonstrations a day are given in this window?"

"Just one." Lavery raised his black brows.

"How long does each demonstration take?"

"Thirty-two minutes exactly."

"Interesting," murmured Ellery. "By the way, is this room kept open at all times?"

"Not at all. There are some very valuable pieces in this room. It is kept locked except when it is being used for demonstration purposes."

"Of course! That was stupid of me," smiled Ellery. "You have a key, naturally?"

"A number of keys exist, Mr. Queen," answered Lavery. "The idea of the lock is more to prevent transient trespassing during the day than to keep out possible night-prowlers. It is presumed that after hours, in an establishment as well guarded as this—provided with modern burglar alarms, guards, and so on—the room would be safe enough against burglary."

"If you will pardon me for interrupting," came the mild voice of MacKenzie, the store manager, "I am in a better position to clear up the question of the keys than Mr. Lavery."

"Delighted to have you," said Ellery quickly, but he began once more to twirl his pince-nez. The Inspector, seated on the bed, preserved a watchful silence.

"We have a number of duplicate keys," explained MacKenzie, "to each of the windows. In this particular instance Mr. Lavery has one, Diana Johnson the demonstrator has one (which she leaves at the Employees' Office desk when she leaves for the day), the floorwalker on this section of the main floor and the store detectives each have one, and there is a complete set of duplicates kept in the general offices on the mezzanine floor. I am afraid very many people could have secured a key."

Ellery did not seem perturbed. He walked suddenly to the door, opened it, peered out over the main floor for a moment, and returned.

"Mr. MacKenzie, will you please summon that clerk at the leather-goods counter opposite this window?"

MacKenzie departed, returning shortly with a short, stout, middle-aged man. He was white-faced and nervous.

"Were you on duty all this morning?" inquired Ellery kindly. The man jerked his head in the affirmative. "And yesterday afternoon?" Another jerk. "Did you leave your post at any time this morning or yesterday afternoon?"

The clerk found his voice. "Oh, no, sir!"

"Very well!" Ellery spoke softly. "Did you at any time during yesterday afternoon or this morning notice any one entering or leaving this window-room?"

"No, sir." The man's tone was assured. "I've been on duty all the time; I couldn't help but notice if any one had used this room, sir. I haven't been very busy," he added, with an apologetic side-glance at MacKenzie.

"Thank you." The clerk left with eager steps.

"Well!" Ellery sighed. "We seem to be progressing, and yet nothing takes definite shape. . . ." Shrugging his shoulders, he turned once more to Lavery.

"Mr. Lavery, are these windows illuminated after dark?"

"No, Mr. Queen. The shades are drawn after every demonstration, and they are kept drawn until the following day."

"Then," and Ellery emphasized the word, "then I take it that these lighting-fixtures are dummies?"

Eyes long since dulled by waiting and wretchedness expectantly followed the direction of Ellery's arm. He was pointing toward the oddly cut, clouded-glass wall lights. The eyes all turned, too, to observe the numerous queerly shaped lamps about the room.

For answer Lavery strode to the rear wall and, after a moment's manipulation, removed one of the modernistic

fixtures. The socket which should have held an electric bulb was empty.

"We have no use for lights here," he said, "so we have not installed them." With a swift movement he restored the fixture to its place on the wall.

Ellery took a decisive step forward. But then he shook his head, retreated, turned to the Inspector.

"Henceforward, or at least for the present, I shall be silent," he said, smiling, "and latinically pass for a philosopher."

12

OUT THE WINDOW . . .

A policeman pushed his way into the room, looked about as if to catch the eye of authority, was summoned peremptorily by old Queen, mumbled a few words, and departed almost as quickly as he had come.

The Inspector immediately took John Gray aside and whispered in the little director's ear. Gray nodded and went to the side of Cyrus French, who was staring blankly into space, muttering to himself. With the aid of Weaver and Zorn, Gray managed to twist French's chair around so that the old man's back was to the body. French noticed nothing. The store physician took his pulse professionally. Marion's hand was at her throat; she stood up quickly and leaned against the back of her father's chair.

Then the door opened and two white-garbed men with visored caps entered, bearing a stretcher between them. They saluted the Inspector, who jerked his thumb toward the sheeted corpse.

Ellery had withdrawn into the far corner of the room beyond the bed to hold communion with his pince-nez. He frowned at it, tapped it on the back of his hand, threw his lightcoat on the bed and sat down, taking his head between his hands. Finally, as if he had come to either

an impasse or a conclusion, he produced from the pocket of his coat the volume it contained, and began to scribble hurriedly on the fly-leaf. He paid not the slightest attention to the two police doctors stooped over the dead woman.

Nor did he protest when he was unceremoniously moved by a silent, nervous man who had entered immediately behind the stretcher bearers, and who was now engaged with the help of an assistant in photographing the dead woman, her position on the floor, the bed, the handbag and other articles connected with the victim. Ellery's eyes followed the police photographer, but abstractedly.

Suddenly he snapped his little book back into his pocket and waited thoughtfully until he caught his father's eye.

"Lord, son," said the Inspector, coming over, "I'm tired. And worried. *And* apprehensive."

"Apprehensive? Come, now—don't fall into that silly frame of mind, dad. Why should you be apprehensive? This case is coming along, coming along. . . ."

"Oh, you've probably caught the murderer and hidden him in your vest-pocket," growled the old man. "I'm not worried about the murderer, I'm worried about Welles."

"Sorry!" Ellery moved closer. "Don't let Welles rile you, dad; I don't think he's as bad as you've painted him. And while he's merely heckling you, I'll be working undercover—grasp the idea?"

"It's not half bad at that," said the Inspector. "My gosh! He's liable to walk in here any minute now, El! I never thought of that! By this time he has a telephoned report and— Yes! What is it?"

A bluecoat tramped in with a message and left.

The Inspector groaned. "Word's just come that Welles is on his way here—now we'll have arrests, interviews, grillings, reporters running over the place, and merry—"

Ellery's air of raillery vanished. He grasped his father's arm and guided him swiftly to an angle in the wall.

"If that's the case, dad, let me tell you what is in my mind—quickly." He looked around; they were fairly unobserved. He lowered his voice. "Have you reached any definite conclusions yet? I'd like to have your reactions before I tell you mine."

"Well—" the old man peered about him cautiously, then cupped his mouth in his small hands—"between you and me, son, there's something queer about the whole business. As far as details are concerned, I'm a little hazy—if you're clearer than I, it's probably because you have had something of the advantage of an observer. But as to the crime itself—the possible motive—the story behind it—I have the inescapable feeling that the murder of Mrs. French is not half so important to us as what may have necessitated the murder. . . ." Ellery nodded thoughtfully. "I have no doubt that this is a carefully planned murder. Despite the weirdness of the place, the apparent sloppiness of the crime, there is amazingly little to go on."

"What about Marion French's scarf?" asked Ellery.

"Fiddlesticks!" said the Inspector contemptuously. "Can't see that it means anything intelligible. In all probability she left it somewhere about and Mrs. French picked it up. . . . But I'll bet a cookie that the Commissioner grabs it."

"I think you're wrong there," commented Ellery. "He'll be afraid to tackle French. Don't lose sight of French's power as head of the Anti-Vice Society. . . . No, dad, for the present Welles will keep his hands off Marion French."

"Well, what have you concluded, Ellery?"

Ellery produced his small volume and turned to the fly-leaf on which he had scribbled a few moments before. He looked up. "I hadn't thought about the remote nuances of the crime, dad," he said. "Although, now that you've brought it up, it seems to me that you are probably correct

about the far-reaching significance of the motive as opposed to the crime itself. . . . No, I've been chiefly occupied until now with more direct affairs. I have four interesting little puzzlers to elucidate. Listen carefully.

"First, and probably most important," he began, referring to his notes, "there is the puzzle of Mrs. French's key. We have a fair sequence of incident. The nightwatchman, O'Flaherty, observes the victim at about eleven-fifty last night with the gold-disked apartment key in her possession. She is lost sight of until twelve-fifteen to-day, when she is found dead—still in the store, but with the key missing from the scene of the crime. The question arises, then: Why is the key missing? It seems on the face of it a pure matter of discovery, doesn't it? Yet—regard the possibilities. It is plausible enough at this time to suspect that the key's disappearance is connected with the crime, more directly with the murderer. A murderer disappears, a key disappears. It is not difficult to imagine that they disappeared together. Now, if this is so—and for the present let us assume that it *is* so—why did the murderer take the key? Obviously, we can't answer that question—yet. But—we now know that the murderer has in his possession a key to a certain apartment—French's private apartment on the sixth floor."

"That's so," muttered the Inspector. "I'm glad you suggested sending one of the boys to watch that apartment this morning."

"I had that thought," said Ellery. "But something else disturbs me. I can't help asking myself: Doesn't the absence of the key perhaps indicate that the body was brought to this window from some other place?"

"I can't see that at all," objected the Inspector. "Can't see that it has anything to do with it."

"Let's not quarrel about it," murmured Ellery. "I can see one very, very interesting possibility that makes my

question logical and the item of Marion French's scarf seems to point the same way. I think that I'll be able to check up soon on the facts—which will put me in a position to prove more definitely what I've just postulated. . . . Let me get on to point number two.

"The natural thought one has on finding the body in this window is that the crime was committed here. Of course! Usually, one would not even stop to question it."

"It seemed funny to me, though," said the Inspector, frowning.

"Ah! It did, eh? Perhaps I can crystallize your suspicion a bit later," said Ellery brightly. "We enter, we see a body, we say: Crime was committed here. But then we stop to observe. We are told by Prouty that the woman has been dead some twelve hours. The body is found a bit after noon. That would make it a short time after midnight when Mrs. French died. In other words, when the crime was committed. Observe that in any case the crime was committed in dead of night. What is the appearance of this window at such a time—of this whole section of the building? Total darkness!"

"And—?" put in the Inspector dryly.

"You don't seem to take my dramatics very seriously," laughed Ellery. "Total darkness, I repeat. Yet we are supposing that this window is the scene of the crime. We prowls about the window, ask ourselves: Are there lights in here? If there are, that's the end of it. With the door closed, and these heavy drapes on the street side, light would be unobserved outside the window-room. We investigate and find—no, no lights. Plenty of lamps, plenty of sockets—no bulbs. I doubt, indeed, if the lamps are even wired. So—we suddenly visualize a crime in total darkness. What—you don't like that idea? Neither do I!"

"There are such things as flashlights, you know," objected Queen.

"So there are. That occurred to me. Then I asked myself: If there was a crime here, there was some logically necessary antecedent action. A crime presupposes a meeting, a probable quarrel, a murder, and in this case, disposal of the body in a *very* queer and inconvenient place—a wall-bed. . . . And all in the rays of a flashlight! As redoubtable Cyrano would remark: No, I thank you!"

"Might have carried bulbs with him, of course," muttered the Inspector, then their eyes met and they both laughed at once.

Ellery grew serious. "Well, let's leave the little matter of illumination for the present. You'll admit it reeks slightly of improbability?

"And now to that exceedingly fascinating little thing—amajig," he continued, "the lipstick engraved with the letter C. That's my point number three. In many ways, it's of extreme significance. The immediate conclusion is that Lipstick marked C does not belong to Mrs. French, whose initials, engraved on three other articles in her bag, are W.M.F. Now, Lipstick marked C is of a noticeably darker shade than the paint on the dead woman's lips. Which not only corroborates the premise that Lipstick marked C is not Mrs. French's, but also that there is *another* lipstick extant somewhere which *did* belong to Mrs. French. Follow? . . . Now where is that lipstick? It is not in this window anywhere. Therefore it is somewhere else. Did the murderer take it, along with the key? That seems silly. Ah—but haven't we a clue? Of course! For observe . . ." he paused, "the dead woman's lips. Half-finished! And of a lighter shade. What does this mean? Undoubtedly that Mrs. French was interrupted while she was dabbing at her lips with her own lipstick now missing."

"Why interrupted?" demanded the Inspector.

"Have you ever seen a woman who began to paint her lips leave them half-painted? It just isn't done. It *must* have been an interruption which prevented those lips from being entirely daubed. And a violent interruption, I'll wager; nothing short of an unprecedentedly odd occurrence would stop a woman from smearing that last red blob on the right place."

"The murder!" exclaimed the Inspector with a queer light in his eye.

Ellery smiled. "Perhaps.—But do you grasp the implication, dad? If she was interrupted by the murder or the incidents immediately preceding the murder, and the lipstick is not in this window—"

"Of course, of course!" exclaimed the old man. He sobered. "It's true, though, that the lipstick might have been taken by the murderer for purposes of his own."

"On the other hand," returned Ellery, "if it was not taken by the murderer, then it is still somewhere in or about the building. You might institute a search through six floors of this drygoods mortuary."

"Oh, impossible! But I suppose we'll have to have a try at it later."

"Perhaps it won't be necessary in about fifteen minutes," said Ellery. "At any rate, a genuinely interesting question comes up: To whom does the C lipstick belong, if it is not Mrs. French's? You might look into that, dad. I have an idea that the answer to that question will bring complications—à la Scott Welles. . . ."

At mention of the Police Commissioner's name the Inspector's features lengthened. "You'd better finish what you began, Ellery; he'll be here any minute now."

"And so I shall." Ellery removed his pince-nez and twirled it recklessly in the air. "Before we proceed to point number four, bear in mind that you're *cherchez*-ing two feminine accessories—*la lipstick de Madame, et sa clef*. . . .

"To point number four, then," continued Ellery with a faraway gleam in his eye. "For point number four we must credit the habitually sharpened perceptions of our grossly underpaid and revered medico, Sam Prouty. He thought it strange that wounds of the nature of Mrs. French's should have bled so little. At least, there was little trace of blood on her body and clothes. . . . By the way, there was also a smear of dried blood on the palm of her left hand—you noticed it, of course?"

"Saw it, all right," muttered the Inspector. "Probably clapped her hand to one of the wounds at the moment she was shot, and then—"

"And then," finished Ellery, "her hand dropped in death and the divine ichor, which by all the laws of physics, according to friend Sam, should have gushed forth, did—what? I should say," he remarked seriously after a pause, "that it obeyed the immutable laws of that exact science and did gush forth freely. . . ."

"I see what you mean . . ." murmured the old man.

"It gushed forth freely—but not in this window. In other words, we must look for an interesting combination of elements to explain away the phenomenon of two bloody revolver-wounds being practically bloodless on the discovery of the body. . . ."

"Let me sum up the indications to this point," Ellery continued swiftly. "To my mind the absence of Mrs. French's apartment key; the absence of normal illuminating-facilities in this window; the absence of Mrs. French's rightful lipstick, which she must have had almost directly before her death, since her lips are only half-painted; the absence of blood from two logically bloody wounds; the presence of Marion French's scarf; and another item of a more general but none the less convincing nature—all converge into one conclusion."

"And that is that the murder was not committed in this

window," said the Inspector, taking snuff with a steady hand.

"Exactly."

"Just what do you mean by still another item which points toward that conclusion, Ellery?"

"Has it struck you at all," answered Ellery slowly, "what an utterly preposterous setting this window-room is for the crime of murder?"

"I did think of it, as I mentioned before, but—"

"You've been too plunged into detail to get a psychological slant on this affair. Think of the privacy, the secrecy, the conveniences, that a fully planned murder requires. Here—what did the murderer have? An unlit, periodically patrolled window. Dangerous from start to finish. In the heart of the main floor, where the nucleus of the nightwatchman's staff is located. Not fifty feet from the constantly present head nightwatchman's office. Why? No, dad, it's perfectly silly! It was the first thought I had when I came in here."

"True enough," muttered the Inspector. "Yet—if it didn't take place here, why transport the body here at all *after* the murder, if that is what was done? It seems to me that almost as much danger, if not more, existed in that event as in the first. . . ."

Ellery frowned. "That had occurred to me, of course. . . . There is an explanation; there must be. I begin to see the manipulation of a fine Italian hand. . . ."

"At any rate," broke in the Inspector with a slight impatience, "so much is clear to me after your analysis: this window is certainly not the scene of the crime. I think I see—yes, of course—it's as plain as day—the apartment upstairs!"

"Oh, that!" Ellery said absently. "Naturally. Wouldn't make sense otherwise. The key, a logical place for the lip-

stick, privacy, illumination . . . yes, yes, the sixth floor apartment by all means. It's my next stop. . . ."

"And it's positively depressing, El!" exclaimed the Inspector, as if struck by a thought. "Imagine! That apartment has been used by five people incessantly since eight-thirty this morning, when Weaver arrived. Nobody noticed anything up there, so evidently traces of the crime were removed from the apartment before that time. Goodness—if only. . . ."

"Now don't be bothering your poor grey head with fancy!" laughed Ellery, suddenly restored to good humor. "Of course the traces of the crime have been removed. The top layer, so to speak. Perhaps even the middle layer. But away down deep, underneath, we may find—who knows? Yes, that's my next stop."

"I can't help worrying about the reason this window was used at all," frowned the Inspector. "Unless it's that time element. . . ."

"Heavens! You're becoming positively a genius, dad!" chuckled Ellery affectionately. "I've just got over solving that little problem for myself. Why was the body placed in the window? Let's apply unailing *logos*. . . ."

"There are two possibilities, either or both of which may be correct. First: to keep attention away from the *real* scene of the crime, which is undoubtedly the apartment. Second, and more logically, *to prevent the body from being discovered before noon*. The dead certainty of the daily demonstration time—which, you have reasoned, of course, was common knowledge to all New York—tenons much too snugly."

"But why, Ellery?" objected Inspector Queen. "Why delay the body's discovery until noon?"

"If only we knew that!" murmured Ellery, with a shrug. "But in a general way it seems reasonable that, if the murderer left the body to be discovered—and he knew it

with certainty—at twelve-fifteen, then he had something to do *before noon* which the discovery of the body prematurely would have made dangerous or impossible. Do you follow me?”

“But what on earth—”

“Yes, what on earth,” replied Ellery sadly. “What did the murderer have to do on the morning of the crime? I don’t know.”

“We’re just stumbling in the dark, Ellery,” said the Inspector with a faint groan. “Just staggering from premise to conclusion without a ray of light anywhere. . . . For example, why couldn’t the murderer have done what he had to do last night, *in the building*? There are telephones, you know, if he had to communicate with some one. . . .”

“Are there? But—we’ll have to check up on that later.”

“I’ll do that right away—”

“Just a second, dad,” interrupted Ellery. “Why not send Velie out to that private elevator to look for traces of blood?”

The Inspector stared at him, made a fist. “Goodness! How stupidly I’ve managed things!” he cried. “Of course! Thomas!”

Velie stalked across the room, received an inaudible instruction, and immediately left.

“I should have thought of that before,” growled the Inspector, turning back to Ellery. “Naturally, if the murder was committed in the apartment, the body had to be brought down here from the sixth floor.”

“Probably find nothing,” commented Ellery. “I’d pick the staircase, myself. . . . But look here, dad. I want you to do something for me.—Welles will be here any moment now. To all intents and purposes this window is the scene of the crime. He’ll want to hear all the testimony all over again, anyway. Keep him down here—give me an hour upstairs alone with Wes Weaver, won’t you? I must

see that apartment at once. Nobody has been in it since the meeting broke up—it's been watched all the time—there *must* be something there. . . . Will you?"

The Inspector wrung his hands helplessly. "Of course, son—anything you say. You can certainly tackle it with a fresher mind than I can. I'll keep Welles down here. Want to examine that Employees' Entrance office, the freight room, and that whole section of the main floor, anyway. . . . But why are you taking Weaver?" His voice sank lower. "Ellery—aren't you playing a dangerous game?"

"Why, dad!" Ellery's eyes opened wide in honest astonishment. "What do you mean? If you've any suspicion of poor Wes, disabuse your mind of it right now. Wes and I were bunkies at school; remember that summer during which I stayed with a chum in Maine? That was Westley's father's place. I know the poor boy as well as I know you. Father's a clergyman, mother's a saint. Background clean, life's always been an open book. No secrets, no past. . . ."

"But you don't know what he's bumped into in the city here, Ellery," objected the Inspector. "You haven't seen him for years."

"Look here, dad," said Ellery gravely. "You've never made a mistake following my judgment, have you? Follow it now. Weaver's as innocent of this crime as a lamb. His nervousness is plainly connected with Marion French. . . . There! The photographer wants to talk to you."

They turned back to the group. Inspector Queen spoke to the police photographer for a few moments. Then, dismissing the man, he resolutely beckoned the Scotch store manager.

"Mr. MacKenzie, tell me—" he asked abruptly, "what is the condition of your telephone service after shopping hours?"

MacKenzie said: "All 'phones except on one trunk line

are cut off at six o'clock. That line is connected with O'Flaherty's desk at the night exit. If there are any incoming calls, he takes them. Otherwise, there is no telephone service at night."

"I see by O'Flaherty's time-sheet and report-sheet that there were no incoming or outgoing calls last night," remarked the Inspector, consulting the chart.

"You can rely on O'Flaherty, Inspector."

"Well," pursued Queen, "suppose some department is working overtime? 'Phone service kept open?"

"Yes," replied MacKenzie. "But only on written request of the head of the department.—I should add that we have very little of that sort of thing here, sir. Mr. French has always insisted that the closing hour be kept more or less strictly. Of course, there are exceptions every once in a while.—If there is no record on O'Flaherty's chart of such a request, you may be sure no lines were open last night."

"Not even in Mr. French's private apartment?"

"Not even in Mr. French's apartment," returned the store manager. "Unless Mr. French or Mr. Weaver instructs the head operator to the contrary."

The Inspector turned questioningly to Weaver, and Weaver shook his head in an emphatic negative.

"One thing more, Mr. MacKenzie. Are you aware of the last time before yesterday that Mrs. French visited the store?"

"I believe it was a week ago Monday, Inspector," replied MacKenzie after some hesitation. "Yes, I'm fairly certain. She came in to speak to me about some imported dress material."

"And she did not appear at the store after that?" Inspector Queen looked around at the other occupants of the room. There was no answer.

At this moment Velie reëntered. He whispered to his

superior and stepped back. The Inspector turned to Ellery. "Nothing in the elevator—not a sign of blood."

A policeman stepped into the window-room and made for the Inspector.

"The Commissioner's here, Inspector."

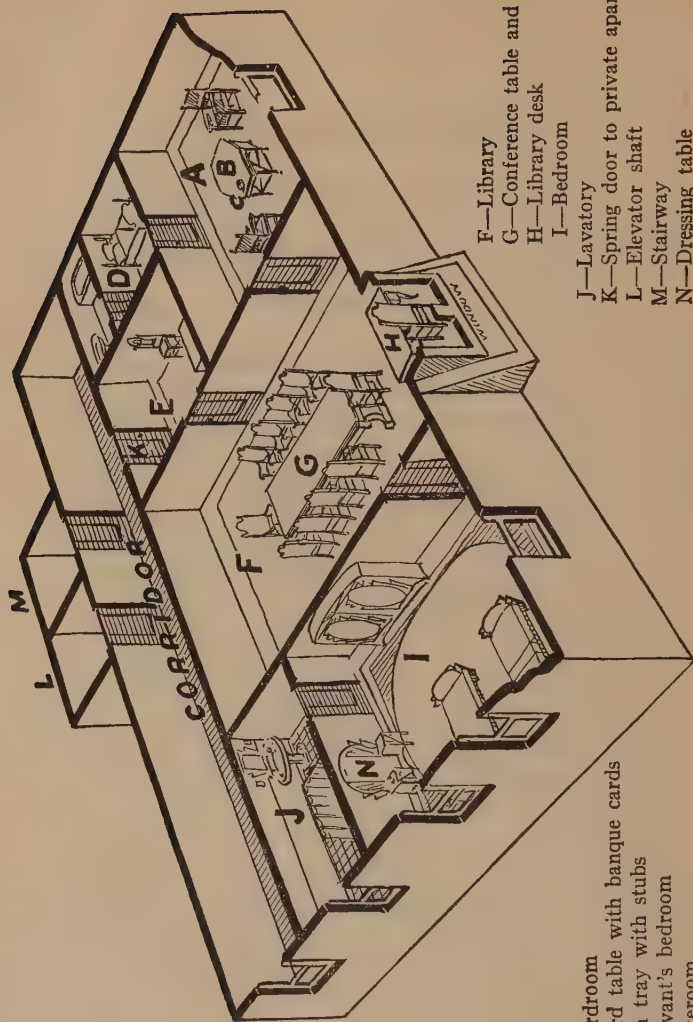
"I'll be right out," said the Inspector wearily. As he left the room, Ellery gave him a meaning glance. He nodded slightly.

When he returned a few moments later, escorting the portly, pompous figure of Commissioner Scott Welles and a small army of detectives and deputies, Ellery and Westley Weaver had vanished. And Marion French sat in her chair, clutching her father's hand, watching the window-door as if with Weaver had gone some of her heart and courage.

THE SECOND EPISODE

"As for the word CLUE, we are indebted for its genesis to mythology. . . . Clue has descended etymologically from CLEW (in common with many other words of similar endings; i.e., TREW, BLEW, etc.) . . . being a literal Old English translation of the Greek word for thread, directly traceable to the legend of Theseus and Ariadne and the ball of cord she gave him with which to grope his way out of the Labyrinth after killing the Minotaur. . . . A clue in the detectival sense may be of an intangible as well as a tangible nature; it may be a state of mind as well as a state of fact; or it may derive from the absence of a relevant object as well as from the presence of an irrelevant one. . . . But always, whatever its nature, a clue is the thread which guides the crime investigator through the labyrinth of non-essential data into the light of complete comprehension. . . ."

—From WILLIAM O. GREEN'S
Introduction to
ARS CRIMINALIS
By John Strang



A—Cardroom
 B—Card table with banque cards
 C—Ash tray with stubs
 D—Servant's bedroom
 E—Anteroom

F—Library
 G—Conference table and chairs
 H—Library desk
 I—Bedroom
 J—Lavatory
 K—Spring door to private apartment
 L—Elevator shaft
 M—Stairway
 N—Dressing table

AT THE APARTMENT: *The Bedroom*

ELLERY and Westley Weaver picked their way unnoticed through the throngs on the main floor. At the rear of the store, Weaver indicated around the bend of the wall a small grilled door. A policeman stood guard with his back to the ironwork.

"That's the private elevator, Ellery."

Ellery exhibited a special police pass signed in Inspector Queen's punctilious hand. The policeman touched his cap and opened the grilled door.

Ellery noted the staircase door around the corner, then entered the elevator. He closed the door carefully, touched the button marked 6, and the elevator began to ascend. They stood in silence, Weaver's lip creased under his teeth.

The elevator was finished in bronze and ebony, with an inlaid composition-rubber floor. It was spotlessly clean. On the further wall was a low divan-like seat covered with black velvet. Ellery adjusted his pince-nez and looked about him with interest. He bent over to examine more closely the velvet seat, craned his neck at a suspicious darkening in an angle of the wall.

"Might have known Velie would overlook nothing," he thought.

The elevator clicked to a stop. The door opened automatically and they stepped out into a wide, deserted corridor. At one end of the corridor was a high window. Almost directly opposite the elevator exit was an un-

paneled door of heavy mahogany. A neat small tablet, with the words:

PRIVATE
CYRUS FRENCH

was affixed to this door.

A detective in plain clothes indolently leaned against the frame. He seemed to recognize Ellery at once, for he greeted him and stepped aside.

"Going in, Mr. Queen?" he asked.

"Righto!" said Ellery, cheerfully. "Be a good man and stick it outside here while we're sniffing around the apartment. If you see any one—with authority—coming, rap on the door. If it's just anybody, shoo 'im away. Understand?"

The detective nodded.

Ellery turned to Weaver. "Let's have your key, Wes," he said in a natural tone. Without a word Weaver handed him the key-case which Inspector Queen had examined in the window not long before.

Ellery selected the gold-disked key and inserted it in the keyhole. He turned and the tumbler slipped back noiselessly. He pushed open the bulky door.

He seemed surprised at its rigid weight, for he stepped back, taking his hand from the door, and it immediately swung shut. He tried the knob. The door was again locked.

"Stupid of me," he muttered, as he again unlocked the door with the key. He waved Weaver inside the apartment before him, and then allowed the door to swing shut once more.

"Special spring lock," commented Weaver. "Why are

you surprised, Ellery? It's to insure absolute privacy. The Old Man's rather a bug on that."

"The door can't be opened from the outside without a key, then?" asked Ellery. "There's no way of fixing the bolt so that the door is temporarily unlocked?"

"The door is always as stubborn as that," said Weaver, with a fleeting grin. "Although I can't see what difference it makes."

"Perhaps all the difference in the universe," said Ellery, knitting his brows. Then he shrugged his shoulders and looked about him.

They stood in a small, almost bare anteroom with a cunningly converted skylight roof. . . . A Persian rug on the floor, a long leather-upholstered bench flanked with standing ash-trays against the wall opposite the door. . . . To the left was a single chair and a little magazine rack. And that was all.

The fourth wall was cut through for another door, smaller and not so formidable-looking.

"Not especially prepossessing," remarked Ellery. "Is this the usual taste of our multimillionaires?"

Weaver seemed to have recovered something of his natural buoyancy, now that he and Ellery were alone. "Don't misjudge the Old Man," he said hastily. "He's really a regular old duck, and knows a plain room from a fancy one. But he keeps this anteroom for the purpose of herding together the people who come to see him on business of the Anti-Vice League. This is a sort of waiting-room. Although, to tell the truth, it hasn't been used much. You know, French has an enormous suite of offices further uptown for Anti-Vice League affairs; most of that business is transacted there. I suppose, though, he couldn't resist the thought of entertaining some of his cronies here when he had the place designed."

"Any visitors of that sort lately?" inquired Ellery, his hand on the knob of the inner door.

"Oh, no! Not for several months, I think. The Old Man's been too wrapped up in the approaching merger with Whitney. Anti-Vice League has suffered, I guess."

"Well, then," said Ellery judiciously, "since there's nothing here of interest, let's proceed."

They walked into the next room, and the door swung shut behind them. This door, however, had no lock.

"This," said Weaver, "is the library."

"So I see." Ellery slouched against the door, surveying the room with open eagerness.

Weaver seemed afraid of silences. He wet his lips and said, "This is also the conference room for directors' meetings, the Old Man's hideaway, et cetera. Rather neat layout, don't you think?"

The room was at least twenty feet square, Ellery estimated, and presented a businesslike, if informal, appearance. In the center of the room stood a long mahogany table, surrounded by heavy red-leather-covered chairs. The chairs presented a ragged appearance, distributed unevenly around the table, showing signs of the haste with which the morning's meeting had been adjourned. Papers in disorderly piles were scattered over the table.

"Not usually that way," commented Weaver, noticing Ellery's grimace of distaste. "But the conference was an important one, everybody was excited, and then the news of the accident downstairs. . . . It's a wonder everything isn't in more of a mess than it is."

"Naturally!"

On the wall opposite Ellery was a severely framed portrait in oils of a ruddy-faced, masterful-jawed man, dressed in the fashion of the 'Eighties. Ellery lifted an eyebrow inquiringly.

"Mr. French's father—the Founder," said Weaver.

Under the portrait were built-in bookcases, a large comfortable-looking chair, and an end-table of modern design. An etching hung over the chair.

The wall on the corridor side and the wall near which they stood were tastefully furniture-covered. On both walls, left and right, were identically decorated doors of the swinging, rotary-hinged type. The doors were finished in a fine-grained reddish leather, studded with brass bolts.

The Fifth Avenue side of the room held a large flat-topped desk, at about five feet from the rear wall. Its shining surface held a French-style telephone, a slip of blue memorandum paper, and at the edge of the desk facing the rest of the room a half-dozen books between handsome onyx book-ends. Behind the desk the wall was pierced by a large dormer-window, draped in heavy red velvet. This window overlooked Fifth Avenue.

Ellery completed his stationary examination with a frown. He looked down at Weaver's key-case, which he still held in his hand.

"By the way, Wes," he said suddenly, "is this your own key? Ever lend it to anybody?"

"That's my own, all right, Ellery," replied Weaver indifferently. "Why?"

"I merely thought that it might be interesting to discover whether the key has ever been out of your possession."

"Nothing there, I'm afraid," said Weaver. "It's never been off my person. As a matter of fact, as far as I know, all five keys have been exclusively in their owner's possession since the apartment was built."

"Hardly," said Ellery in a dry tone. "You forget Mrs. French's." He eyed the key contemplatively. "Greatly bother you, Westley, if I appropriate yours for the time? I do believe I shall go into the business of collecting this particular type of key."

"Help yourself," replied Weaver in a small voice. Ellery detached the key from the case, which he forthwith returned to Weaver. The key he put into his vest-pocket.

"By the way," said Ellery, "is this your office too?"

"Oh, no!" replied Weaver. "I have my own office on the fifth floor. I report there in the mornings before coming up here."

"*Enfin!*" Ellery moved suddenly. "*Aux armes!* Westley, it is my earnest desire to peep into the privacy of Mr. French's bedroom. Will you oblige by leading the way?"

Weaver indicated the brass-studded door on the opposite wall. They traversed the thick-carpeted distance silently and Weaver swung the door inward. They emerged into a large squarish bedroom, with windows overlooking both Fifth Avenue and 39th Street.

The bedroom was, to Ellery's unaccustomed eyes, astonishingly modernistic in tone and decoration. Twin beds sunk almost to the floor level, both based on concentric ovals of a highly polished wood, caught the eye at once. A queerly shaped man's wardrobe and a daringly designed woman's dressing-table indicated that the room had been laid out for the use of Mrs. French as well as of her husband. Two diversions in the quietly toned but cubistic design of the walls pointed to closets within. Two chairs of unorthodox shape, a small night-table, a telephone table between the twin beds, a few bright scatter-rugs—Ellery, unacquainted with the Continental vogue at first hand, found the French bedroom a most engaging study.

On the wall toward the corridor was a door. It was partly open. Through it Ellery saw a lavatory in colored tiles as strikingly modern as the bedroom itself.

"Just what are you looking for, if you're looking for anything specific at all?" inquired Weaver.

"Lipstick. Should be here. . . . *And* key. Let's hope

it *isn't* here." Ellery smiled and stepped into the center of the room.

He observed that the beds were made up. Everything seemed in perfect order. He strode over to the wardrobe, looked at its bare top. The dressing-table caught his eye. He walked toward it as if half afraid of what he might find. Weaver followed him curiously.

The top surface of the dressing-table held few articles. A small tray of mother-of-pearl; a powder-jar; a hand-mirror. On the tray were some feminine accoutrements—tiny scissors, a file, a buffer. Nothing had the appearance of recent use.

Ellery frowned. He turned his head away, turned it back as if fascinated by the dressing-table.

"Really," he muttered, "it should be here. Of all places. The logical one. Of course!"

His fingers had touched the tray. Its shell was slightly curved at the edges. As the tray moved, something rolled off the table, where it had nestled under the tray's edge, and fell to the floor.

With a grin of triumph Ellery picked up the article. It was a small, gold-chased lipstick. Weaver came over in some astonishment to see the find. Ellery pointed to the three initials on the cap: W.M.F.

"Why, that's Mrs. French's!" cried Weaver.

"Dear Mrs. French," murmured Ellery under his breath. He lifted the cap of the stick and twisted. A pinkish blob of paste appeared.

"Seems to jibe," he said aloud. As if struck by a thought, he searched his coat pocket and pulled out the larger, silver-chased lipstick from the dead woman's bag in the window.

Weaver suppressed an exclamation. Ellery looked at him pointedly.

"So you recognized it, Wes?" he asked, smiling. "Now

tell me—since we're *tête-à-tête* and your innocent mind can grope trustingly in my presence. . . . To whom does this lipstick marked C belong?"

Weaver winced, raised his eyes to Ellery's cool ones. "To Bernice," he said slowly.

"Bernice? Bernice Carmody? The missing lady," drawled Ellery. "I suppose Mrs. French was her real mother?"

"Mrs. French was the Old Man's second wife. His daughter by his first wife is Marion. First wife died about seven years ago. Bernice came along with Mrs. French when the Old Man remarried."

"And this is Bernice's lipstick?"

"Yes. I recognized it immediately."

"Evidently," chuckled Ellery, "from the way you jumped. . . . Just what do you know, Wes, about this Bernice's disappearance? From Marion French's demeanor, I gather that she knows something. . . . Now, now, Wes—be patient with me! I'm not a lover, you know."

"Oh, but I'm sure Marion's not keeping anything back!" protested Weaver. "When the Inspector and I went out a while ago to meet her near the entrance, she told him that Bernice and Mrs. French had not slept at home. . . ."

"Not really!" Ellery was genuinely startled. "How is that, Wes? The facts, old boy, the facts!"

"This morning, just before the conference," explained Weaver, "the Old Man asked me to call his home and let Mrs. French know that he had returned from Great Neck safely. I talked to Hortense Underhill, the housekeeper—really more than a housekeeper; she's been with the Old Man for a dozen years. Hortense said that the only one up and about was Marion. This was a little after eleven. French spoke to Marion, told her the usual thing.

"At a quarter to twelve Hortense called up in something of a panic. She'd been worried over the silence of

Mrs. French and Bernice, and on going to their bedrooms had found both empty, and the beds not slept in. Which meant, of course, that both women had not been home all night. . . ."

"And what did French say to that?"

"He seemed annoyed rather than worried," replied Weaver. "Seemed to think that they had probably stayed overnight with friends. We went on with the conference, which broke up when we received the news about the—you know."

"Why on earth dad hasn't followed up that disappearance . . ." muttered Ellery with a singular facial contortion. He sprang to the telephone and ordered the store operator to summon Sergeant Velie. When Velie's voice boomed over the wire, Ellery rapidly acquainted him with the facts, advised him to let the Inspector know that he considered it imperative that Bernice be searched for immediately; and added that Commissioner Welles be kept downstairs as long as it was in Inspector Queen's power to do so. Velie grunted complete understanding and hung up.

Ellery instantly demanded the French house telephone number from Weaver, and transmitted it to the operator.

"Hello!" An indistinguishable murmur in the depths of the instrument. "Hello. This is a police officer talking. Miss Hortense Underhill? . . . Never mind that now, Miss Underhill. . . . Has Bernice Carmody returned yet? . . . I see. . . . Please! Take a cab immediately and come straight to the French store. Yes, yes, immediately! . . . By the way, has Miss Carmody a maid? . . . Very well. Bring her with you. . . . Yes, to Mr. French's private apartment on the sixth floor. Ask for Sergeant Velie when you get downstairs."

He hung up. "Your Bernice has not returned," he said mildly. "For what reason Fortunatus alone knows." He

looked thoughtfully at the two lipsticks in his hand. "Was Mrs. French a widow, Wes?" he asked after a pause.

"No. She was divorced from Carmody."

"That's not Vincent Carmody, the antique dealer, by any chance?" asked Ellery, without changing expression.

"That's the man. Know him?"

"Slightly. I've been in his establishment." Ellery frowned as he regarded the lipsticks. His eyes keened suddenly.

"Now, I wonder . . ." he said, putting the gold stick aside and turning the silver one over in his fingers. He unscrewed the cap, twisted the body so that the dark red paste emerged. He kept twisting absently until the entire carmine length was visible. He tried to twist it still further. To his surprise, there was a distinct click! and the entire paste in its metal setting fell out of the silver case into his hand.

"What have we here?" he asked in honest astonishment, peering into the cavity. Weaver leaned over for a better view. Ellery tipped the case and shook it.

A little capsule about a half-inch around and perhaps an inch long fell out into his hand. It was filled with a powdery white crystalline substance.

"What is it?" breathed Weaver.

Ellery shook it, held it up to the light. "Well, sir," he said slowly, a grim smile lifting the corners of his lips, "it looks very much like heroin to me!"

"Heroin? The drug, you mean?" asked Weaver excitedly.

"Precisely." Ellery restored the capsule to the lipstick case, screwed the paste section into place, and put the lipstick into his pocket. "Nice commercial heroin. I may be wrong, but I doubt it. I'll have the stuff analyzed for me at Headquarters. Westley," and he turned squarely to French's secretary, "tell me the truth. To your knowledge

is—or was—any member of the French family a drug addict?”

Weaver replied with unexpected promptitude. “Now that you’ve found this heroin, if that’s what it is, it seems to me that I recall something queer in the conduct and actions of Bernice, especially of late. That’s her lipstick, isn’t it?—Ellery, I shouldn’t be at all surprised if Bernice ~~is~~ addicted to the stuff. She’s been jumpy, nervous, peaked-looking—alternated fits of gloom with spasms of hilarity. . . .”

“You’re describing the symptoms, all right,” said Ellery. “Bernice, eh? The lady becomes more and more interesting with every passing moment. How about Mrs. French—French himself—Marion?”

“No—not Marion!” almost shouted Weaver. Then he grinned in shame. “Sorry. No, Ellery, you forget that the Old Man is head of the Anti-Vice League—good Lord!”

“Quite a situation, eh?” smiled Ellery. “And Mrs. French was normal in that respect, you think?”

“Oh, absolutely.”

“Anybody in the family besides yourself suspect that Bernice is a dope fiend?”

“I don’t think so. No, I’m pretty sure no one did. Certainly not the Old Man. Marion has commented at times about Bernice’s conduct and queer actions, but I’m positive she doesn’t suspect—this. As for Mrs. French—well, it’s hard to tell just what she thought. Always was tight-mouthed when it came to her darling Bernice. Though if she did suspect, she did nothing about it. I’m inclined to believe she was ignorant of the whole business.”

“And yet—” Ellery’s eyes gleamed, “it’s passing strange, Westley, that the evidence should be found on Mrs. French’s body—in her handbag, in fact . . . now, isn’t it?”

Weaver shrugged his shoulders wearily. "My head's in a perfect whirl."

"Westley, old boy," pursued Ellery, fingering his pince-nez, "what do you think Mr. French would say if he knew there was drug-addiction in his own family?"

Weaver shuddered. "You don't know what a temper the Old Man has when he's aroused. And I think that that would arouse him—" He stopped short, looked at Ellery suspiciously. Ellery smiled.

"Time grows apace," he said with heartiness, but there was a disturbed light in his eye. "On to the lavatory!"

14

AT THE APARTMENT: *The Lavatory*

"I hardly know what we may expect to find here," said Ellery dubiously, as they stood in the glittering bathroom. "As a matter of fact, the lavatory is the last place to look. . . . Everything all right, Westley? Anything strike you as being out of place?"

Weaver answered rapidly enough, "No," but a tinge of uncertainty shaded his voice. Ellery glanced at him sharply, then around at the room.

It was long and narrow. The tub was sunken. The washbowl was slender and modern-looking. Above it hung a cunningly disguised chest. Ellery pulled open its concealed door. It held on its three glass shelves some bottles of house medicines, hair tonic, ointment, a tube of tooth-paste and one of shaving cream, a safety-razor in an odd-looking wooden case, two combs, and several other articles.

Ellery slammed the door shut in a little flurry of disgust. "Come on, Wes," he growled. "I'm doddering. There's nothing here." Nevertheless, he stopped to open a door on the side. It was a closet for lavatory linens. He poked his hand into a hamper and pulled out several soiled towels.

These he examined carelessly and threw back, looking at Westley. . . .

"Well, spill it, son!" he said, pleasantly enough. "There is something on your mind. What's rotten in Denmark?"

"It's queer," said Weaver thoughtfully, pulling at his lip. "I thought it queer at the time, and now that things have happened, well—I'm thinking it's even queerer. . . . Ellery, there's something missing!"

"Missing?" Ellery's hand shot out and closed about Weaver's arm in a mighty grip. "My God, and you've kept mum! What is it that's missing, man?"

"You'll think I'm an idiot . . ." said Weaver hesitantly.

"Westley!"

"Sorry." Weaver cleared his throat. "Well, there's a razor blade missing, if you must know!" He scanned Ellery's face for a sign of levity.

But Ellery did not laugh. "A razor blade? Tell me about it," he urged, leaning against the closet door. He eyed the cabinet above the washbowl speculatively.

"I got here this morning a bit earlier than usual," began Weaver, with a worried frown. "Had to prepare for the Old Man's arrival, and there were a number of papers to straighten out for the directors' meeting. Usually, you know, the Old Man doesn't get here until ten o'clock; it's only on special occasions—like this one of the conference—that he comes earlier. . . . So I left the house in something of a hurry, intending to shave up here. I do that quite often, by the way—which is one of the reasons I keep a razor in the apartment. . . . When I got here—it was about eight-thirty—I dashed for my razor. And there wasn't any blade."

"That seems not so extraordinary," said Ellery with a smile. "You simply didn't have any in the cabinet."

"Oh, but I did!" protested Weaver. "The reason I felt something was funny was that last evening, before I left

the store, I had shaved up here. I left the blade in the razor."

"Didn't you have any others?"

"No. I'd run out of them and intended to get some more. But I forgot to bring some in with me this morning. Consequently, when I wanted to scrape some of the old beard off there wasn't anything to do it with. Blade had vanished! Sounds silly, doesn't it? And I particularly left that blade in the razor yesterday because I've forgotten to restock before, and I found that you can always squeeze another shave out of the old blade."

"You mean that it had gone, absolutely? You're sure you left it in the razor?"

"Positive. I cleaned it and slipped it back."

"You didn't break it, or anything like that?"

"I tell you no, Ellery," Weaver replied patiently. "That blade was there."

Ellery's lips curved upward humorously. "A pretty problem at that," he said. "Is that why your face is fuzzed?"

"Right enough. I haven't had a chance all day to go out for a shave."

"Seems peculiar," said Ellery thoughtfully. "I mean that you should have had only one blade left in the cabinet. Where are French's blades?"

"He doesn't shave himself," replied Weaver a trifle stiffly. "He never has. Patronizes the same barber every morning."

Ellery did not comment further. He opened the cabinet and took down the wooden razor-case. He examined the plain silver razor inside, but could see nothing of interest.

"You handled the razor this morning?"

"What do you mean?"

"Did you take it out of the case?"

"Oh, no! I didn't at all. When I saw the blade was missing, I didn't even bother."

"That's *very* interesting." Ellery lifted the razor handle to the level of his eyes, holding it by the tip, careful not to touch the silver surface with his fingers. He breathed on the metal. It clouded over for an instant.

"Not the sign of a print," he commented. "Wiped away, undoubtedly." He smiled suddenly. "We begin to find signs of a presence, an apparition, a wraith here last night, old boy. Careful, wasn't he, she, or weren't they?"

Weaver laughed aloud. "Then you think my stolen blade has something to do with this mess?"

"To think," said Ellery solemnly, "is to know. . . . Keep this in mind, Westley. I believe I heard you say downstairs that you left here last night a bit before seven. The blade, then, was taken from this apartment between about seven o'clock last night and eight-thirty this morning."

"Astounding!" murmured Weaver derisively. "So that's the sort of hocus-pocus one must cultivate in order to be a detective?"

"Laugh, varlet!" said Ellery sternly. . . . He stood in a queer attitude of reflection. "I think we'll be going into the next chamber," he said in an altogether different voice. "I begin to see a tiny light. It's far off but—gossamer glimmer, nevertheless! *Allons, enfant!*"

AT THE APARTMENT: *The Cardroom*

He strode purposefully from the lavatory, marched through the bedroom, entered the library once more. Weaver followed, his face betraying an objective interest startingly in variance with his nervousness of the past hour. He seemed to have forgotten something.

"What's past that door?" demanded Ellery abruptly, pointing to the second red-leather, brass-studded door on the opposite side of the room.

"That's the cardroom," replied Weaver interestedly. "Think there's something to look for, El? By George, you're getting me positively excited!" Then he stopped, his face lengthened, and he stood soberly surveying his friend.

"Cardroom, eh?" Ellery's eyes were bright. "Tell me, Wes—you were the first in the apartment this morning and you're in the best position to know—did any one who was in the library today go into any of the other rooms?"

Weaver pondered for a moment. "Except that the Old Man went into the bedroom when he got in this morning, and put his coat and hat away, nobody left the library."

"Didn't French visit the bathroom to wash up?"

"No. He was in a confounded hurry to dictate some store business and get ready for the conference."

"You were with him when he visited the bedroom?"

"Yes."

"And you're positive that none of the others—Zorn, Trask, Gray, Marchbanks—left *this room* all morning?" He took a short turn about the room. "By the way, you were here every minute of the time, I suppose?"

Weaver smiled. "I seem to be in an affirmative mood this afternoon.—Yes to both questions."

Ellery rubbed his hands together in a little spasm of glee. "The apartment, then, with the one exception of the library, is in exactly the same condition as when you arrived at eight-thirty. Excellent, most excellent, my omniscient and exceedingly helpful Westley!"

He walked briskly toward the cardroom door and pushed it open, Weaver at his heels. And Weaver cried out in sheer astonishment from behind Ellery's broad shoulders. . . .

The cardroom was smaller than both the library and the bedroom. It was paneled in walnut. Cheerful drapes hung over the single large window overlooking Fifth Avenue. A thick rug covered the floor.

But Ellery, following the line of Weaver's gaze, saw that he was staring in horror at a hexagonal, baize-covered card-table in the center of the room. A small bronze ash-tray and some playing-cards, peculiarly arranged, were on the table. Two heavy folding-chairs were pushed away from the table.

"What's the trouble, Wes?" asked Ellery sharply.

"Why, that—that table wasn't there last night!" stammered Weaver. "I was in here looking for my pipe just before I left, and I'm sure. . . ."

"Not really!" murmured Ellery. "You mean the table was folded up, put away, out of sight?"

"Of course! The room was cleaned up yesterday morning by the charwoman. And those cigarets in the ash-tray . . . Ellery, some one was in here after I left last night!"

"Obviously. And in the bathroom, too, if we're to believe the story of the missing razor-blade. The important thing is—why was some one in here? Just a moment." He went swiftly to the table and looked down curiously at the cards.

On both sides of the table were two small piles of cards—one stack with the faces up, the other closed. In the center of the baize were two rows of four stacks, open, with the pasteboards in descending order, as Ellery verified by investigating carefully. Between the two rows were three smaller piles.

"Banque," muttered Ellery. "Peculiar!" He looked at Weaver. "You know the game, of course?"

"No, I don't," said Weaver. "I recognized the layout of the cards as that of banque, because I've seen it played

at the French house. But I don't understand the game very well; it gives me a headache. But then most card-games do. I never was much good at it."

"So I remember," laughed Ellery, "especially that night at Bloombury's when I had to sit in for you to recoup a hundred dollar I.O.U. at stud. . . . You say you've seen the game played at French's—and that's most interesting. Calls for questions, I do believe. Not many people know how to play Russian banque."

Weaver regarded Ellery strangely. His eyes went furtively to the stubs of four cigarets lying in the ash-tray. He looked back at once. "Just two people in the French household," he said in a strangled voice, "played banque."

"And they are—or were, if I must follow your past tense?" asked Ellery in a cool voice.

"Mrs. French and—Bernice."

"Oho!" Ellery whistled softly. "The elusive Bernice. . . . Nobody else play?"

"The Old Man abhors all forms of gambling," said Weaver, worrying his lips with a forefinger. "Won't play cards for anything. Doesn't know an ace from a deuce. Marion plays bridge, but only because it's something of a social necessity. She dislikes cards, and I never heard of banque before I entered French's employ. . . . But Mrs. French and Bernice were violently addicted to it. Whenever they had the opportunity they played it. None of us could quite understand it. A form of the glamorous gambling fever, I don't doubt."

"And the friends of the family?"

"Well," said Weaver slowly, "the Old Man has never been so narrow as to forbid card-playing altogether in his home. That's why this apartment, by the way, is fitted out with a cardroom. It's for the convenience of the directors—sometimes they play here between sessions. But

in the house itself I have had plenty of opportunity to observe visitors and friends. I've never seen any one play banque except Mrs. French and Bernice."

"Beautiful—beautiful," said Ellery. "So symmetrically conclusive! That's the way I like things. . . ." But his brow was wrinkled with thought. "And the cigarets, old boy—tell me why you've been trying for five minutes not to look at the cigarets in the ashtray?"

Weaver flushed guiltily. "Oh!" He was silent. "I hate to say it, Ellery—I'm in the most hellish position imaginable. . . ."

"The cigarets, of course, are Bernice's brand. . . . You may as well come out with it," said Ellery wearily.

"How did you know?" cried Weaver. "But—I suppose it was clear enough to an alert . . . Yes, they're Bernice's. Her own brand. She has—had them made up for her especially."

Ellery picked up one of the stubs. It was silver-tipped, and just below the tip was printed in script the brand-name: *La Duchesse*. Ellery poked his finger among the remaining litter of stubs. His look sharpened as he noted that all, without exception, had been smoked to approximately the same length—to about a half-inch of the tip.

"Pretty thoroughly smoked out, all of them," he commented. He sniffed at the cigaret between his fingers, looked at Weaver inquiringly.

"Yes, scented. Violet, I think," Weaver said promptly. "The manufacturer provides the scent according to the specifications of his customers. I remember hearing Bernice place an order not long ago when I was over at the French's—placed it over the telephone."

"And *La Duchesse* is rare enough to have weight in an inquiry. . . . Good fortune, was it?" He talked to himself rather than to his friend.

"What do you mean?"

"No matter. . . . And, of course, Mrs. French did not smoke?"

"Why—how did you know?" demanded Weaver in surprise.

"How nicely things fit together," murmured Ellery. "So very, very nicely. And Marion—does she smoke?"

"Thank God—no!"

Ellery regarded him quizzically. "Well!" he said all at once. "Let's see what's behind this door."

He crossed the room to the wall opposite the window. A small plain door opened into a little, simply furnished bedroom. Beyond it was a tiny bathroom.

"A servant's room," explained Weaver. "Originally planned for a valet, but it's never been used to my knowledge. The Old Man isn't fussy and he'd rather have his man at the Fifth Avenue house."

Ellery made a swift examination of the two little rooms. He emerged in a moment, shrugging his shoulders.

"Nothing there, and there wouldn't be. . . ." He paused, twirling his pince-nez in the air. "We have a rather remarkable situation here, Wes. Consider: We are now in possession of three direct indications of Miss Bernice Carmody's presence in this apartment last night. Or rather two direct indications, and one—the first—of a circumstantial nature. That is—the lipstick marked C from Mrs. French's handbag. This is the least damaging of the three, of course, since it does not *prove* presence and might have been brought here by Mrs. French. But it must be kept in mind. Second, the game of banque, which any number of reputable witnesses, I gather, would testify, as strongly as you, was indulged in by Mrs. French and Bernice practically to the exclusion of the rest of the family and friends of the family. You noticed, didn't you, that the game has the appearance of having been interrupted at a critical stage? The way the cards are lying

there—they give the distinct impression that just when the game became hotly competitive, it was stopped. . . . And third, the most critical indication of the three—the *La Duchesse* cigarets. These are so obviously Bernice's that they would be acceptable in court as admissible evidence, I'm sure, if supported by strong circumstantial evidence of a confirmatory nature."

"But what? I don't see—" cried Weaver.

"The suspicious fact that Miss Bernice Carmody has vanished," replied Ellery gravely. "Flight?" He flung the word at Weaver.

"I can't—I won't believe it," said Weaver weakly, but there was a curious relief in his voice.

"Matricide is an unnatural crime, to be sure," Ellery mused, "but is not unknown. . . . Is it possible—" His reflections were disturbed by a rapid knock at the apartment door. It was surprisingly loud, coming as it did through the three walls of the cardroom, the library, the anteroom.

Weaver looked startled. Ellery straightened with a jerk, swiftly looked around once more, then motioned to Weaver to precede him from the room. He closed the brass-studded door with gentle fingers.

"That must be your good hussif, Hortense Underhill, and the maid," said Ellery almost gayly. "I wonder if they can be the harbingers of—more evidence against Bernice!"

16

AT THE APARTMENT: *Again the Bedroom*

Weaver flung open the outer door to admit two women. Sergeant Thomas Velie loomed solidly behind them.

"Did you send for these ladies, Mr. Queen?" demanded Velie, his broad frame filling the door. "One of the boys downstairs caught 'em trying to get past the man guard-

ing the elevator—said you sent for them. Is it all right?"

His eyes roved dourly about the apartment—as much of it as he could see from his position at the corridor door. Ellery smiled.

"It's all right, Velie," he drawled. "They'll be safe with me. . . . And how is the dear Commissioner progressing with the Inspector?"

"Got his hooks into the scarf," growled Velie, and shot a keen look at Weaver's instantly clenched fists.

"Follow up the lead I gave you over the telephone?" asked Ellery serenely.

"Yes. She's among the missing. Got two men on it already." The Sergeant's stern face cracked in a fleeting smile. "How much longer will you need the Inspector's—coöperation downstairs, Mr. Queen?"

"I'll buzz you, Velie. Fly away now, like a good little chap." Velie grinned, but his face was frozen into its customary immobility as he wheeled and made for the elevator.

Ellery turned to the two women, who were standing close together eying him apprehensively. He addressed the taller and elder of the two—a stiff, slab-figured woman in her early fifties, marble-haired and viciously blue-eyed.

"You're Miss Hortense Underhill, I take it?" he asked severely.

"That's right—Mr. French's housekeeper." Her voice was not unlike her person—thin, sharp, steely.

"And this is Miss Bernice Carmody's maid?"

The other woman, a timid little creature with faded brown hair and a plain face, started convulsively at being directly addressed and crouched closer to Hortense Underhill.

"Yes," answered the French housekeeper. "This is Miss Doris Keaton, Bernice's maid."

"Very good." Ellery smiled, stood aside with a deferen-

tial little bow. "If you'll follow me, please—?" He led the way through the red-leather door leading into the large bedroom. Weaver marched obediently behind.

Ellery indicated the two bedroom chairs. "Sit down, please." The two women sat down. Doris Keaton kept her big vapid eyes on Ellery, surreptitiously hitching her chair closer to the housekeeper's.

"Miss Underhill," began Ellery, pince-nez in hand, "have you ever been in this room before?"

"I have." The housekeeper seemed determined to out-stare Ellery. Her cold blue eyes flashed colder fire.

"Oh, you have?" Ellery paused politely without removing his gaze. "When, may I ask, and on what occasion?"

The housekeeper was undaunted by his coolness. "A peck of times. That is, so to speak. I never came, though, except at Mrs. French's request. Each time it was clothes."

"It was clothes?" Ellery seemed puzzled.

She nodded stonily. "Why, of course. They were far apart, those times, but whenever Mrs. French intended to stay here overnight, she would ask me to bring a next day's change for her. So that is how—"

"Just a moment, Miss Underhill." There was a pleasant glitter in Ellery's eyes as he reflected. "This was her usual custom?"

"So far as I know."

"When"—Ellery leaned forward—"when was the last time Mrs. French asked you to do this?"

The housekeeper did not reply at once. "I should say about two months ago," she answered finally.

"As far back as that?"

"I said two months ago."

Ellery sighed, straightened. "One of these closets, then, belonged to Mrs. French?" he asked, indicating the two modern doors set in the wall.

"Yes—that one there," she replied promptly, pointing to the concealed door nearest the lavatory. "But not only for Mrs. French's clothes—the other girls sometimes kept things in there, too."

Ellery's eyebrows shot up. "Not really, Miss Underhill!" he ejaculated. His hand caressed his jaw tenderly. "I may infer, then, that both Miss Marion and Miss Bernice sometimes used Mr. French's apartment?"

The housekeeper regarded him levelly. "Sometimes. Not very often. Only when Mrs. French was not using it, and they brought a girl friend along to spend the night—on a sort of lark, you might call it."

"I see. Have they slept here with a—a 'girl friend,' I believe you said?—recently?"

"Not that I know. Not for five or six months at least."

"Very good!" Ellery flipped his pince-nez into the air with a certain briskness. "Now, Miss Underhill, I want you to tell me quite exactly when you saw Miss Carmody last, and under what circumstances."

The two women exchanged meaning glances; the maid bit her lip and looked guiltily away. But the housekeeper retained her poise. "I *knew* that was coming," she announced in a calm voice. "But you needn't think either of my poor lambs had anything to do with this, whoever you are. They didn't and you can take that for gospel. I don't know where Bernice is, but be sure there's foul play been done her. . . ."

"Miss Underhill," said Ellery gently, "I'm sure this is all quite interesting, but we are in something of a hurry. If you'll answer my question—?"

"All right, if you must have it." She set her lips, folded her hands in her lap, looked at Weaver indifferently, and began. "It was yesterday.—I'd better begin right with when they woke up; it'll make easier telling.—Well, both Mrs. French and Bernice woke up at about ten o'clock

yesterday morning, and the hair-dresser attended each in their rooms. They got dressed and had a bite of something. Marion had already had lunch. I served them myself. . . .”

“Pardon me, Miss Underhill,” interrupted Ellery, “but did you hear what they talked about over the luncheon table?”

“I don’t listen to what isn’t my affair,” retorted the housekeeper tartly, “so all I can tell about *that* is that they talked about a new gown being made for Bernice. And Mrs. French seemed a little absent-minded, too. She actually got her sleeve into her coffee—the poor thing! But then she was always a little funny—maybe she had a premonition of what was to come, you know?—God rest her troubled soul! . . . Well, after lunch they remained in the music-room until about two o’clock, talking and things. Don’t know about what, either! But they seemed as if they wanted to be let alone. Anyway, when they came out I heard Mrs. French tell Bernice to go upstairs and dress—they were going to take a ride through the Park. Bernice went upstairs, and Mrs. French held back to tell *me* to tell *Edward Young*, the chauffeur, to get the car out. Then Mrs. French went upstairs herself to dress. But in about five minutes I saw Bernice coming down the stairs, all dressed for the street, and when she saw me she told *me* to tell her *mother*—whispered, she did—that she’d changed her mind about taking a ride in the Park and was going out to do some shopping. And she fair ran out of the house!”

Ellery seemed poignantly concerned. “Clearly if somewhat volubly told, Miss Underhill. And what would you say was the state of Miss Carmody’s nerves all day?”

“Poor,” replied the housekeeper. “But then Bernice has always been a high-spirited and sensitive girl. Yesterday she seemed a little more nervous than usual, though, now

that I come to think of it. She was all pale and fidgety when she slipped out of the house. . . ."

Weaver moved sharply. Ellery cautioned him with a glance and motioned the housekeeper to continue.

"Well, not long after, Mrs. French came down dressed for her drive. She asked for Bernice, and I told her about Bernice's going off that way, and I gave her Bernice's message. I thought for a minute that she was going to faint—poor thing!—she got so pale and sick-looking, which wasn't like her at all, and then she took hold of herself and she said: 'All right, Hortense. Tell Young to put the car back in the garage. I shan't be going out, either . . .' and she marched right back upstairs again. Oh, yes! She did tell me, though, before she went up, to let her know the *instant* Bernice got back home. . . . Well, sir, that's the last I saw of Bernice, and practically the last of Mrs. French. For the poor soul stayed in her room all afternoon, came down for dinner with Marion, and then went back up to her room again. She seemed more anxious than ever about Bernice, and twice she made as if to go to the telephone, but she seemed to change her mind. Anyway, about a quarter after eleven at night she came down with her hat and coat on—yes, sir, I know you'll ask me: the brown toque and the fox-trimmed cloth coat—and she said she was going out. And go out she did. And that's the last I saw of poor Mrs. French."

"She didn't order the car?"

"No."

Ellery took a turn about the room. "And where was Miss Marion French all day?" he asked suddenly. Weaver glanced at Ellery in shocked surprise.

"Oh! Miss Marion was up bright and early—always is an early riser, the dear child—and she left the house right after luncheon, saying she had a shopping appointment with one of her friends. I think she also went to the

Carnegie Hall for the afternoon, because only the day before she showed me the tickets for a piano-playing thing by some foreigner. She does love music so, that child! She didn't get back home until about half-past five. She and Mrs. French had dinner together, and she was surprised that Bernice was absent. Anyway, right after dinner she dressed over and went out again."

"At what hour did Miss Marion French return?"

"That I can't say. I went to bed myself at eleven-thirty, after releasing the house staff for the night. Didn't see anybody come in. Mrs. French had told me not to wait up, besides."

"Not a particularly well-regulated household," murmured Ellery. "Miss Underhill, please tell me how Miss Carmody was attired when she left the house—it was about two-thirty, I presume?"

Hortense Underhill shifted restlessly in her chair. The maid still regarded Ellery with stupid, frightened eyes.

"Just about," said the housekeeper. "Well, Bernice was wearing—let me see now—her blue felt hat with the brilliant fancy, her grey chiffon dress, her grey fur-trimmed coat, and a pair of black leather pumps with rhinestone buckles. Is that what you wanted to know?"

"Precisely," said Ellery with a charming smile. He took Weaver to one side. "Wes, do you know why I've called these two worthy ladies into consultation?" he demanded in an undertone.

Weaver shook his head. "Except for the fact that you wanted to know about Bernice. . . . Oh, I say, Ellery, it wasn't that you're looking for further indications of Bernice's presence here, is it?" he asked aghast.

Ellery nodded gloomily. "We have three apparent indications of the young lady's alleged visit to the apartment, to be journalistic. . . . Something told me there were more. Indications that I might not be able to descry. The

housekeeper, though—the maid, Bernice's maid—” He broke off, shook his head with impatience at his own thoughts. He turned to the waiting women. “Miss Doris Keaton.” The maid jumped, stark terror in her eyes. “Don't be afraid, Miss Keaton,” said Ellery mildly, “I shan't bite you. . . . Did you help Miss Bernice dress yesterday afternoon, after luncheon?”

The girl whispered: “Yes, sir.”

“Would you recognize the articles of clothing, for example, that she wore yesterday, if you saw them here and now?”

“I—I think so, sir.”

Ellery walked to the closet door nearest the lavatory, threw it wide—disclosing a rack hung with multicolored gowns, a silken shoe-bag tacked to the inner side of the door, and a top shelf on which lay several hat-boxes—stepped back, and said:

“There's your territory, Miss Keaton. See what you can find.” He stood directly behind the girl, watching her with quick sharp flashes of his eyes. He was so absorbed in her movements that he did not even feel the presence of Weaver at his side. The housekeeper sat, a thin stone, in her chair, watching them.

The maid's fingers trembled as she rummaged among the numerous gowns on the rack. After going through the entire rack, she timidly turned to Ellery and shook her head. He motioned her to proceed.

She stood on tiptoe and lifted from the shelf the three hat-boxes. She opened these one by one and scrutinized them briefly. The first two boxes contained hats belonging to Mrs. French, she said hesitantly. This was corroborated by a frigid nod from Hortense Underhill.

The maid lifted the lid from the third box. She uttered a little choked cry and reeled backward, touching Ellery.

The contact seemed to burn her skin. She jumped away, fumbled for a handkerchief.

"Well?" asked Ellery softly.

"That's—that's Miss Bernice's hat," she whispered, biting the handkerchief nervously. "The one—she wore when she left the house yesterday afternoon!"

Ellery eyed the hat narrowly as it lay, brim to the bottom, in the box. The soft blue felt crown, due to its position, had collapsed. A glittering pin was fixed above the turned-down brim, just visible from where he stood. . . . Ellery made a brief request and the maid lifted the hat from the box and offered it to him. He turned it over in his fingers, then silently handed the hat back to the girl, who as silently took it, put her hand inside the crown, flipped the hat upside down, and deftly returned it to the box in that position. Ellery, who had been about to turn away, stiffened instantly. Nevertheless, he said nothing, watching the girl replace the three hat-boxes on the shelf.

"The shoes now, please," he said.

Obediently the maid bent over the silk shoe-rack hanging on the inside of the closet door. As she was about to remove a woman's pump, Ellery stopped her with a tap on the shoulder and turned to the housekeeper.

"Miss Underhill, will you please verify the fact that this is Miss Carmody's hat?"

He lifted a long arm, took down the box with the blue hat inside, removed the hat, and handed it to Hortense Underhill.

She examined it briefly. Unaccountably, Ellery had stepped away from the closet to stand by the lavatory door.

"It's hers," said the housekeeper, looking up belligerently. "But what that has to do with anything, I don't know."

"That's honest." Ellery smiled. "Will you please re-

turn it to the shelf?" As he said this, he stepped slowly forward again.

The woman, sniffing, put her hand inside the hat, inverted it, and placed it in that position in the hat-box. She carefully lifted it to the shelf and as carefully returned to her chair. . . . Weaver observed Ellery's sudden grin with a lost bewilderment.

Then Ellery did an amazing thing—a thing that brought an unbelieving stare from each of the three people watching him. He reached up to the shelf and took down the same hat-box!

He opened it, whistling a tuneless little air and, removing the much-handled blue hat, offered it to Weaver for inspection.

"Here, Wes, let's have your masculine opinion," he said cheerfully. "Is this Bernice Carmody's hat?"

Weaver regarded his friend with astonishment, taking the hat mechanically. Shrugging, he looked at the hat. "Looks familiar, Ellery, but I can't be positive. I rarely notice women's clothes."

"Hmm." Ellery chuckled. "Put the hat back, Wes old boy." Weaver sighed, grasped the hat gingerly by the crown and dropped it, brim down, into the box. He fumbled with the lid, affixed it, shoved the box back onto the shelf—for the third time in less than five minutes.

Ellery turned briskly to the maid. "Keaton, just how fastidious in her habits is Miss Carmody?" he asked, feeling for his pince-nez.

"I—I don't get you, sir."

"Does she bother you much? Does she put her own things away generally? Exactly what are your duties?"

"Oh!" The maid's eyes sought the housekeeper once more for guidance. Then she looked down at the carpet. "Well, sir, Miss Bernice was—is always careful about her

clothes and things. Most always puts her hats and coats away herself when she gets in from being out. My work's more doing personal things—fixing her hair, laying out her dresses, and such.”

“A *very* careful girl,” put in Miss Underhill icily. “Rare and unusual, I’ve always called it. And Marion’s the same way.”

“Delighted to hear it,” said Ellery with perfect gravity. “Delighted is hardly the word for it. . . . Heigh-ho, Keaton, the shoon!”

“Huh?” The girl was startled.

“Shoes—shoes, I should say.”

There were at least a dozen pairs of shoes, of assorted styles and colors, protruding from separate pockets in the rack. Without exception each of the shoes lay in its compartment with the tip inside and the heel showing, hooked over the lip of the pocket.

The maid Keaton went to work. She looked over the shoes, lifting out several to examine them closely. Suddenly she snatched at a pair of black leather pumps, lying in adjacent compartments. Each pump sported a large and heavy rhinestone buckle which glittered in a shaft of sunlight as she held them up before Ellery.

“These! These shoes!” she cried. “Miss Bernice wore them yesterday when she went out!”

Ellery took them from her shaking fingers. After a moment he turned to Weaver.

“Mud splashes,” he said laconically. “And here’s a spot of wet. Seems indubitable!” He handed them back to the maid, who tremblingly replaced them in their compartments. . . . Ellery’s eyes narrowed at once. She had put the shoes back with the heels *inside*, despite the fact that all the other shoes in the rack had the heels showing.

“Miss Underhill!” Ellery withdrew the black pumps from their pockets. The housekeeper rose sulkily.

"Miss Carmody's?" Ellery demanded, handing her the shoes.

She eyed them briefly. "Yes."

"Having reached complete agreement," drawled Ellery with a smiling change of tone, "please be so good as to return these shoes to the rack."

Without a word she obeyed. And Ellery, watching closely, chuckled to observe that she had duplicated the maid's action in putting the pumps into the rack heels first, so that the tips and buckles protruded from the pockets.

"Westley!" he said at once. Weaver approached wearily. He had been standing at a window, looking moodily down over Fifth Avenue. . . . And when Weaver replaced the pumps in the rack, he grasped the heels and stuck the shoes in tips first.

"Why do you do that?" asked Ellery as the two women, now convinced of his madness, moved uneasily away from the closet.

"Do what?" demanded Weaver.

Ellery smiled. "Easy, Hamlet. . . . Why do you put the shoes into the bag so that the heels hang over the pocket?"

Weaver stared at him. "Why, they're all that way," he said blankly. "Why should I put them in the opposite way?"

"*Alors*," said Ellery, "*on a raison*. . . . Miss Underhill, why did you put the shoes back into the rack with the tips showing, when all the others have the heels showing?"

"Anybody would know that," snapped the housekeeper. "These black pumps have big buckles. Didn't you see what happened when Mr. Weaver put them back tips first? The buckles caught on the material of the bag!"

"Wondrous woman!" muttered Ellery. "And the others haven't any buckles, of course. . . ." He read confirmation in the housekeeper's eyes.

He left them standing before the closet and paced silently back and forth the length of the bedroom. His lips puckered fiercely as he mused. Suddenly he turned to Miss Underhill.

"I want you to look this closet over very carefully, Miss Underhill, and tell me, if you possibly can, whether anything is not there which you know should be there. . . ." He stepped back and waved his hand.

She stirred into activity, rummaging efficiently through the gowns, the hat-boxes, the shoes once more. Weaver, the maid, Ellery watched her in silence.

She paused in her work, looked undecidedly at the shoe-bag, then up at the shelf, hesitated, turned to Ellery.

"I can't be sure," she said thoughtfully, her cold eyes searching Ellery's, "but it seems to me that, while all of Mrs. French's things are here that should be here, two things of Bernice's are *not* here that should be here!"

"No!" breathed Ellery. He did not seem unduly surprised. "A hat and pair of shoes, no doubt?"

She glanced at him quickly. "How did you know? . . . Yes, that's what I thought. I remember several months ago when I was bringing down some things of Mrs. French's, Bernice asked me to take her grey toque down, too. And I did. And then there was her pair of low-heeled grey kid shoes—two tones of grey, they were—I'm fair certain I brought *those* down with me once. . . ." She turned sharply on Doris Keaton. "Are they in Miss Bernice's wardrobes at home, Doris?"

The maid shook her head with vigor. "No, Miss Underhill. I haven't seen them for a long time."

"Well, there you are. Grey felt toque, close-fitting, no trimming, and a pair of grey kid walking-shoes. They're missing."

"And that," said Ellery with a little bow that made

Miss Underhill stare, "is precisely that. Thank you so much. . . . Westley, will you escort Miss Underhill and the timidacious Keaton to the door? Tell the man outside to see that they're taken down to Sergeant Velie and kept out of the way of Commissioner Welles at least until everybody troops up here. . . . Undoubtedly, Miss Underhill, Marion French will be glad," and he bowed again to the housekeeper, "of your maternal and warming presence. *Good afternoon!*"

The instant the outer door had closed upon Weaver and the two women, Ellery ran across the library to the door of the cardroom. He entered with swift steps and stared down at the card-table with its neatly heaped piles of pasteboards and its butt-strewn ashtray. He sat down carefully in one of the chairs and examined the cards. Picking up the heavy stack of closed cards before him, he spread them out without disturbing their sequence. He frowned after a while, referred to eleven piles of cards in the center of the table. . . . Finally he rose, puzzled, defeated. He replaced all the stacks exactly as he had found them.

He was staring gloomily at the cigaret-stubs when he heard the outer door click shut and Weaver reënter the library. Ellery turned at once and left the cardroom. The red-leather door swished softly to behind him.

"Ladies taken care of?" he inquired absently. Weaver nodded almost with sulkiness. Ellery squared his shoulders, eyes twinkling. "Worrying about Marion, I'll wager," he said. "Don't, Wes. You're acting like a granny." He looked slowly about the library. His eyes came to rest after a time on the desk before the dormer-window. "I think," he announced dictatorially, sauntering toward the desk, "we'll take our ease, in a manner of speaking, and see what we can see. Rest being the sweet sauce of labor, as Plutarch so aptly says—set, Wes!"

AT THE APARTMENT: *The Library*

They sat down, Ellery at the comfortable swivel-chair behind the desk, Weaver in one of the leather-covered chairs at the conference table.

Ellery relaxed, letting his glance shift from wall to wall of the library, flicker over the table, the litter of business papers, the pictures on the wall, the glass top of the desk before him. . . . His glance fell idly on the slip of blue memorandum paper by the telephone. With perfect unconcern he picked it up and read it.

It was an official memorandum. On it was neatly typed a message.

Ellery reread the memorandum earnestly. He looked up at the disconsolate countenance of Weaver.

"Is it conceivable. . . ." he began. He broke off suddenly. "Tell me, Wes—when did you type this memorandum?"

"Eh?" Weaver started at the sound of Ellery's voice. "Oh, that! That's a memo I sent around to the Board of Directors. Typed it yesterday afternoon, after the Old Man left for Great Neck."

"How many copies did you make?"

"There were seven all told—one for each director, one for myself, and one for the files. This copy is the Old Man's."

Ellery spoke quickly. "How is it that I find it here on the desk?"

Weaver was surprised at the seeming inconsequentiality of Ellery's question. "Oh, I say!" he protested. "Just a matter of form. I left it here so that the Old Man could see in the morning that I'd taken care of the matter."

"And it was here—on the desk—when you left the apartment last night?" persisted Ellery.

INTER-OFFICE MEMORANDUM

C
O
P
Y

To: Mr. French ✓
Mr. Gray
Mr. Marchbanks
Mr. Trask
Mr. Zorn
Mr. Weaver

Monday, May 23, 19—

A special meeting of the Board of Directors is hereby called for the morning of Tuesday, May the twenty-fourth, at eleven o'clock, in the Conference Room. Do not fail to attend. Details of the Whitney-French negotiations will be discussed. It is hoped that a final decision may be reached officially at that time. Your presence is imperative.

Mr. Weaver is to meet Mr. French in the Conference Room at nine a.m. promptly to prepare the notes for final directorial discussion.

[Signed] Cyrus French,

[Per] Westley Weaver,
Sec'y.

"Well, of course!" said Weaver. "Where should it be? Not only that, but it was *still* there when I got in this morning." He grinned feebly.

But Ellery was serious. His eyes glittered. "You're sure

of that? . . .” He half-rose from the swivel-chair in a strange excitement. He sank back. “Seems to fit with the rest of the jigsaw,” he muttered. “How beautifully it explains that one unexplained point!”

Thoughtfully he stowed the blue paper, uncreased, in a capacious wallet which he took from his breast-pocket.

“You’ll say nothing of this, of course,” he said slowly. . . . Weaver nodded and relapsed into apathy. Ellery bent forward, placed his elbows on the glass top, his head in his hands. He stared before him. . . . Something seemed to disturb his revery. His eyes, blank and pre-occupied, focused by degrees on the books between the onyx book-ends, standing austere on the desk in his direct line of vision.

After a moment, as if to satisfy a mounting curiosity, he straightened up and became entirely absorbed in the titles of the books. His long arm swooped down on one of them, carried it back for closer observation.

“By the wisdom of Bibliophilus!” he murmured at last, looking up at Weaver. “What a queer collection of volumes! Does your employer make a habit of reading such heavy stuff as *An Outline of Paleontology*, Wes? Or is this a text-book hang-over from your undergraduate days? I can’t recall your having a particular flair for science. It’s by old John Morrison, too.”

“Oh, that!” Weaver was momentarily embarrassed. “No, that’s the—the Old Man’s, I suppose, Ellery. His books entirely. Don’t think I’ve ever observed the titles, as a matter of fact. What did you say—paleontology? Didn’t know he went in for it.”

Ellery regarded him keenly for a brief moment, then replaced the book. “And what’s more—do you know,” he said softly, “this is fetching!”

“What?” asked Weaver nervously.

“Well, bend an ear to these titles: *Fourteenth Century*

Trade and Commerce, by Stani Wedjowski. There's a rare one for you, although it is fitting that a department store magnet be interested in the history of merchanting. . . . And this one—*A Child's History of Music*, by Ramon Freyberg. A child's history, mind you. And *New Developments in Philately*, by Hugo Salisbury. A passion for stamps! Queer, queer, I tell you. . . . And—good heavens!—*Nonsense Anthology*, by that surpassing idiot, A. I. Throckmorton!" Ellery lifted his eyes to Weaver's troubled ones. "Dear young Dane," he said slowly, "I can understand a chronic bibliophile having this bizarre collection on his desk, for some dark purpose of his own, but I'll be immortally damned if I can make it jibe with my conception of Cyrus French, head of the Anti-Vice League and merchant prince. . . . Your employer does not impress me as having the intellectual potentialities of a paleontological field worker, who is a stamp-collecting addict, who has a passion for medieval commerce, who knows so little of music that he must read a child's history of it, and finally who indulges in the sickening horseplay of the year's best—or worst—vaudeville jokes! . . . Wes, old boy, there is more here than meets the vacillating eye."

"I'm quite at sea," said Weaver, shifting in his chair.

"And you should be, you should be, my child," said Ellery as he rose and walked over to the bookcase on the wall to his left. He lightly hummed the thematic air of *Marche Slav* as he scanned the titles of the volumes behind the glass partitions. After a moment's scrutiny he returned to the desk, where he sat down and again fingered the books between the book-ends in an absent way. Weaver's eyes followed him uneasily.

"From the books in the case," resumed Ellery, "my suspicions seem to be borne out. Nothing but works on social welfare and sets of Bret Harte, O. Henry, and Richard Harding Davis, *et al.* All of which compress nicely into

the obvious intellectual stratum of your nice Old Man. Yet on the desk . . .” He mused. “And they show no signs of use,” he complained, as if disturbed further by this heinous crime against literature. “In two cases, where the volumes are bound that way, the leaves are still uncut. . . . Westley, tell me truthfully, is French interested in these subjects?” He flipped his finger at the books before him.

Weaver answered immediately. “Not to my knowledge.”

“Marion? Bernice? Mrs. French? The directors?”

“I can answer positively in the case of the French family, Ellery,” replied Weaver, jumping from his chair and pacing up and down before the desk. “None of them reads such stuff. As for the directors—well, you’ve seen them.”

“Gray might be interested in this preposterous *mélange*,” said Ellery thoughtfully. “He’s the type. But that child’s history of music. . . . Well!”

He bestirred himself. On the fly-leaf of the little volume in his coat pocket he made a careful memorandum of the titles and authors of the desk volumes. With a sigh he dropped the pencil back into his vest pocket and once more began to stare blankly at the books. His hand played idly with one of the book-ends.

“Mustn’t forget to ask French about these books,” he murmured, more to himself than to Weaver, who still paced furiously up and down the room. “—Sit down, Wes! You disturb my train of thought. . . .” Weaver shrugged, sat down quiescently. “Nice things, these,” Ellery said in a casual voice, indicating the book-ends. “That’s a very curious bit of carving on the onyx.”

“Must have cost Gray a pile of dollars,” mumbled Weaver.

“Oh, they were a gift to French?”

“Gray gave them to him on his last birthday—in March.

They were imported, I know—I remember Lavery commenting on their rarity and beauty a few weeks ago.”

“Did you say—March?” asked Ellery suddenly, bringing the black shining book-end closer to his eyes. “That’s only two months ago, and this—” He quickly picked up the companion piece to the book-end in his hand. He placed them side by side on the glass top of the desk, all at once handling them with meticulous delicacy. He beckoned to Weaver.

“Do you see any difference between these?” he asked in some excitement.

Weaver leaned over, put out his hand to lift one of them. . . .

“Don’t touch it!” said Ellery sharply. “Well?”

Weaver stood up straight. “No call to shout, Ellery,” he said reproachfully. “As far as I can see, the felt under this one seems faded a little.”

“Don’t mind my rude manners, old son,” Ellery said. “I thought that difference in shade wasn’t wholly my imagination.”

“I can’t understand why the green felts should vary in color,” remarked Weaver in a puzzled way, returning to his chair. “Those book-ends are nearly new. They must have been all right when the Old Man got them—they were, in fact. I’d have noticed the discoloration had there been one.”

Ellery did not answer at once. He stared down at the two pieces of carved onyx. They were both cylindrical in shape, with the carving on the outer sides. On the under sides, where the book-ends were to be placed against the desk, were pieces of fine green felt. In the strong clear afternoon sun, streaming through the big window, one exhibited a marked difference in the shade of green.

“Here’s a pretty mystery,” muttered Ellery. “And what it means, if it means anything at all, I can’t see at

the moment. . . ." He looked up at Weaver with a glint in his eye. "Have these book-ends ever been out of this room since Gray presented them to French?"

"No," replied Weaver. "Never. I'm here every day, and I would know if they'd been moved."

"Have they ever been broken, or repaired, even here?"

"Why, of course not!" said Weaver, puzzled. "That seems sort of silly, El."

"And yet essential." Ellery sat down and began to twirl his pince-nez, his eyes riveted on the book-ends before him. "Gray's an intimate of French, I take it?" he asked suddenly.

"His best friend. They've known each other for over thirty years. They have good-natured quarrels periodically about the Old Man's obsession in the matter of white slavery, prostitution and the like, but they've always been unusually close."

"Which is as it should be, I suppose." Ellery sank into deep and concentrated thought. He did not take his eyes from the book-ends. "I wonder, now. . . ." His hand dipped into his coat pocket and emerged with a small magnifying-glass. Weaver regarded his friend in astonishment, then burst into laughter.

"Ellery! Upon my word! Just like Sherlock Holmes!" His mirth was unadulterated, inoffensive, like the man himself.

Ellery grinned sheepishly. "It *does* seem theatrical," he confessed. "But I've found it a handy little tool at times." He bent lower, applied the glass to the book-end with the darker green felt.

"Looking for fingerprints?" chuckled Weaver.

"You can never tell," said Ellery sententiously. "Although a glass isn't infallible. You need fingerprint powder to make absolutely sure. . . ." He discarded the book-end and bent the glass on its mate. As he scanned the lighter

green of its felt, his hand shook convulsively. Disregarding Weaver's cry of "What is it?" he fixed his attention rigidly on a portion of the material where the felt met the onyx, at an edge. A thin line, so thin that to the naked eye it was like a hair, broadened slightly under the magnification of the lens. This line, which extended all around the bottom of the book-end, was actually composed of glue—the glue with which the felt was pasted to the onyx. The second book-end also had the glue-line.

"Here, take the glass, Wes, and focus it at the juncture of felt and onyx," commanded Ellery, pointing to the under-side of the book-end. "Tell me what you see—be careful you don't touch the surface of the onyx!"

Weaver bent over and eagerly looked through the glass. "Why, there's a sort of dust stuck in the glue—it's dust, isn't it?"

"Unorthodox-looking dust," said Ellery grimly, seizing the lens and again examining the felt at that portion of the glue-line. In another moment he had swept the eye of the glass over the other surfaces of the book-end. He employed the same tactics with the second book-end.

Weaver uttered a short exclamation. "I say, El, mightn't it be the same stuff you found in Bernice's lipstick? Heroin, I think you called it!"

"Smart guess, Westley," smiled Ellery, his eye fast to the lens. "But I seriously doubt it. . . . This will require analysis, and immediately. Something twitters a warning message in my subconscious."

He dropped the magnifying glass on the table, thoughtfully regarded the two book-ends once more, then reached for the telephone.

"Get Sergeant Velie—yes, detective-sergeant—on the wire for me immediately." He spoke rapidly to Weaver while he waited, receiver to ear. "If this stuff is what I am beginning to think it is, old boy, the plot thickens like a

purée. However, we'll see. Get me a good wad of absorbent cotton from the bathroom-closet, will you, Wes? Hello, hello—Velie?" he said into the telephone, as Weaver disappeared through the brass-studded door, "this is Ellery Queen speaking. Yes, from the apartment upstairs. . . . Velie, send me one of your best men at once. . . . Who? . . . Yes, Piggott or Hesse will do. At once! And mum's the word in the hearing of Welles. . . . No, you can't help—yet. Hold in, you bloodhound!" He chuckled as he hung up.

Weaver returned with a large carton filled with absorbent cotton. Ellery took it from him.

"Watch me, Wes," he announced with a laugh. "Watch carefully, because it may be necessary for you in the not remote future to testify on the witness stand as to precisely what I did here to-day. . . . Are you ready?"

"I'm all eyes," grinned Weaver.

.. "Allay-oop!" With a prestidigitator's flourish Ellery whipped out of the large pocket of his sack-coat a curious metal packet. He pressed a tiny button and the lid flew open, disclosing black leather pads of thin tough texture, pierced for small bits of waxed thread, each of which held a shining little instrument.

"This," said Ellery, showing his even white teeth, "is one of my most prized possessions. Given to me with the benediction of *Herr Burgomeister* of Berlin last year for the little aid I gave him in snaring Don Dickey, the American gem-thief. . . . Cunnin', isn't it?"

Weaver fell back weakly. "What on earth is it?"

"One of the handiest contraptions ever conceived by the mind of man for the use of the criminal investigator," replied Ellery, his fingers busy with the thin leather mats. "This was created especially for your humble servant through the gratitude of the Berlin mayor and the co-operator of the German central detective bureau. At my

own specifications, incidentally—I knew what I wanted. . . . You'll observe that an almost incredible number of articles are packed in this amazingly small aluminum container—aluminum for its lightness, by the way. Everything in it that a first-class detective might conceivably need during a scientific investigation—on a lilliputian scale, but strong, compact, and extraordinarily utilitarian.”

“Well, I'll be damned!” exclaimed Weaver. “I didn't know you went in for this sort of thing so seriously, Ellery.”

“Let the contents of my work-chest convince you,” smiled Ellery. “Here we have two accessory lenses—Zeiss, by the way,—for my pocket magnifier; stronger than usual, you see. Here's a tiny steel tape measure with the automatic recoil, 96-inch length, reverse side in centimeters. Red, blue, and black crayons. Undersize drawing-compass and special pencil. One vial each of black and white fingerprint powder, with camel's-hair brushes and stamping pad. Packet of glassine envelopes. Small calipers and smaller tweezers. Collapsible probe, adjustable to various lengths. Tempered steel pins and needles. Litmus paper and two tiny test-tubes. Combination knife containing two blades, corkscrew, screw-driver, awl, file, scraper. Specially designed field-compass—and don't laugh. Not all investigations are conducted in the heart of New York. . . . And that's not the last by any means. Red, white and green twine of thread-like thinness, but very strong. Sealing-wax. Small 'lighter'—made specially for me. Scissors. And, naturally, a stop-watch made by one of the world's best watch-makers—a Swiss in the employ of the German government. . . . How do you like my traveling work-case, Wes?”

Weaver looked incredulous. “Do you mean to tell me all those things are in that ridiculously small aluminum container?”

"Exacty. The entire contraption is some four inches wide by six inches long, and weighs slightly less than two pounds. Thickness of a fair-sized book. Oh, yes! I forgot to mention a crystal mirror embedded in the wall of one of the aluminum sides. . . . But I'd better be getting down to work. Keep your eyes open!"

From one of the leather mats Ellery extracted the tweezers. Adjusting one of the more powerful lenses in his pocket-glass, he carefully placed the first book-end in a fixed position on the desk, held the magnifier to his eye with his left hand, and with his right painstakingly maneuvered the tweezers into the hardened glue which contained the suspicious-looking particles. He instructed Weaver to hold in readiness one of the glassine envelopes and, uprooting the almost invisible grains, placed them carefully in the envelope.

He laid down the glass and the tweezers, and sealed the envelope instantly.

"I think I've bagged them all," he said with satisfaction. "And the ones I've missed Jimmy will get. . . . Come!"

It was Detective Piggott. He closed the outer door softly and entered the library with ill-concealed curiosity.

"Sergeant said you wanted me, Mr. Queen," and his eyes were on Weaver.

"Righto. Just a sec, Piggott, and I'll tell you what to do." Ellery scribbled an inky note on the reverse side of the envelope. It read:

"DEAR JIMMY: Analyze powder-grains in envelope. Extract any additional particles in glue-line of book-end marked A, also analyze. Check on book-end marked B for similar grains. After analyzing the grains, *and not until then*, check both book-ends for fingerprints other than my own. Could bring out a print myself, but if you find any, have it 'shot' in the lab and a photoprint immediately made. 'Phone all informa-

tion to me, *personally*, as soon as you've done. I'm at French apartment in French store. Piggott will tell you.

E. Q."

Marking the book-ends *A* and *B* with his red crayon, he swathed both in absorbent cotton, wrapped them in some paper Weaver found for him in the desk, and handed package and envelope to the detective.

"Take these down to Jimmy at the headquarters laboratory as fast as you can get there, Piggott," he said insistently. "Don't let anything stop you. If Velie or my father corners you on the way out, say it's on business for me. On no account let the Commissioner get wind of what you're carrying off the premises. Now scoot!"

Piggott left without a word. He was too well trained in the methods of the Queens to ask questions.

And as he slipped out of the door, he saw the shadow of a rising elevator through the frosted glass wall. He turned and sped down the emergency stairs just as the door slid open and Commissioner Welles, Inspector Queen and a small cohort of detectives and policemen stepped out.

18

SCRAMBLED SIGNS

Within five minutes the private corridor outside French's sixth floor apartment was crowded with a score of people. Two policemen stood guard at the door. Another stood with his back to the elevator, his eyes on the emergency staircase-door nearby. In the anteroom lounged several detectives smoking cigarets.

Ellery sat smiling behind French's desk in the library. Commissioner Welles puffed about the room, shouting orders to detectives, opening the doors leading off the library, peering like a myopic owl at things strange to him. Inspector Queen talked with Velie and Crouther near the

dormer-window. Weaver stood miserably in a corner, unnoticed. His eyes frequently sought the anteroom door, beyond which he knew was Marion French. . . .

"You say, Mr. Queen," grunted Welles, out of breath, "that the cigaret stubs and the game of—blast it! what is it again?—banque are the only signs of this Carmody girl's presence here?"

"Not at all, Commissioner," said Ellery gravely. "You forget the shoes and hat in the closet. I believe I recounted the housekeeper's identification—?"

"Yes, yes, of course!" grumbled Welles. He frowned. "Here, you fingerprint men!" he shouted, "have you covered that little room off the cardroom?" Without waiting for a reply, he bellowed an unintelligible order to several photographers who were busy over the table holding the cards and cigaret-stubs. Finally, mopping his brow, he beckoned imperiously to Inspector Queen.

"What do you think, Queen?" he demanded. "Looks like a pretty clear case, eh?"

The Inspector sent a sidewise glance at his son, and smiled cryptically. "Hardly, Commissioner. We've got to find the girl first, you know. . . . Work's barely scratched. We haven't had the time to check a single alibi, for example. Despite these clues pointing to Bernice Carmody, we're not at all satisfied that there isn't something deeper. . . ." He shook his head. "At any rate, Commissioner, there's a heap of work waiting for us. Anybody you'd like to question? We have 'em all outside in the corridor waiting."

The Commissioner looked fierce. "No! Can't say I do at this stage. . . ." He cleared his throat. "What's next on your list? I've got to get down to City Hall for a conference with the Mayor and I can't give this thing the personal attention it deserves. Well?"

"I want to clear up a few moot points," replied Queen

dryly. "Several people out there will stand questioning. French himself—"

"French. Yes, yes. Too bad. Feel sorry for the man. Quite a blow." Welles looked around nervously and lowered his voice. "By the way, Queen, while there is not to be the slightest deviation from the highest considerations of duty, you understand, it might be—ah—wise to allow French to get home to his physician's care. . . . As for this stepdaughter business, I hope"—he paused uncomfortably—"I might say I have the feeling that this girl has made a complete getaway. You're to follow her up conscientiously, of course. . . . Too bad. I— Well! I must be going."

He turned unceremoniously on his heel, and with something like a sigh of relief tramped toward the door, followed by his bodyguard of detectives. He turned in the anteroom and shouted back, "I want a quick solution, Queen—too many unsolved homicides this past month." And he disappeared with a final quiver of his fat sides.

There was silence for several seconds after the anteroom door closed. Then the Inspector shrugged his shoulders lightly and crossed the room to Ellery's side. Ellery dragged a chair over for his father and they held a whispered conversation for many minutes. The words "razor-blade," . . . "book-ends," . . . "books" . . . and "Bernice" . . . recurred at intervals. The old man's face grew longer and longer as Ellery talked. Finally, he shook his head in despair and rose.

An altercation beyond the anteroom door brought up the heads of all the men in the library. A woman's passionate voice and the gruff tones of a man intermingled. Weaver's nostrils quivered and he dashed across the room and flung open the door.

Marion French was endeavoring frantically to push past the burly figure of a detective in the anteroom.

"But I must see Inspector Queen!" she cried. "My father— Please don't touch me!"

Weaver grasped the detective's arm and violently pushed him aside.

"Get your hands off her!" he growled. "I'll teach you to handle a lady that way. . . ."

He would have attacked the amused detective if Marion had not thrown her arms around him. By this time the Inspector and Ellery had hurried up.

"Here! Ritter, stand aside!" said the Inspector. "What's the trouble, Miss French?" he asked gently.

"My—my father," she gasped. "Oh, it's cruel, inhuman. . . . Can't you see he's ill, out of his mind? For God's sake, let us take him home! He's just fainted!"

They pushed into the hallway. A crowd of people were stooping over Cyrus French, who had collapsed and lay, white-faced, still, on the marble floor. The store physician, small and dark, bent over him in distress.

"Out?" asked the Inspector with some concern.

The physician nodded. "Should be in his bed right now, sir. In a dangerous state of collapse."

Ellery whispered to his father. The old man clucked worriedly, shook his head. "Can't take a chance, Ellery. The man is ill." He signed to two detectives and Cyrus French, arms hanging limply, was carried into the apartment and laid on one of the beds. He regained consciousness a moment later, groaning.

John Gray wriggled his way past a policeman and stormed into the bedroom.

"You can't get away with this sort of thing, Inspector or no Inspector!" he cried in his high-pitched voice. "I demand that Mr. French be sent home immediately!"

"Keep your shirt on, Mr. Gray," admonished the Inspector mildly. "He's going in a moment."

"And I'm going with him," squeaked Gray. "He'll

want me, he will. I'll take this up with the Mayor, sir. I'll—"

"Shut *up*, sir!" roared Queen, his face scarlet. He whirled on Detective Ritter. "Get a cab."

"Miss French." Marion looked up, startled. The Inspector irritably took a pinch of snuff. "You may leave with your father and Mr. Gray. But please remain at home until we call this afternoon. We will want to look over the premises and perhaps question Mr. French, if he's in a condition to see us. And—I'm sorry, my dear."

The girl smiled through wet lashes. Weaver moved stealthily to her side, drew her a little apart.

"Marion dear—I'm awfully sorry I didn't lam that brute for you," he stammered. "Did he hurt you?"

Marion's eyes widened, softened. "Don't be silly, darling," she whispered. "And don't be getting mixed up with the police. I'll help Mr. Gray get father home, and stay there just as Inspector Queen ordered me to. . . . You won't be—in any trouble, dear?"

"Who? I?" Weaver laughed. "Now don't be worrying your pretty head about me.—And as for the store, I'll keep an eye on everything. Tell your father that when he can understand. . . . Do you love me?"

There was no one looking. He bent swiftly and kissed her. Her eyes glowed in answer.

Five minutes later Cyrus French, Marion French and John Gray had left the building under a police escort.

Velie lumbered over. "Got two of the boys on the trail of this Carmody girl," he reported. "Didn't want to tell you before with the Commissioner around—busy and all that."

Queen frowned, then chuckled. "All my boys are turning traitor to the City," he said. "Thomas, I want you to send somebody out on the trail of Mrs. French after she left her house last night. She walked out about eleven-

fifteen. Probably took a cab, because she got here at eleven-forty-five, which would make it about right in the after-theater traffic. Got it?"

Velie nodded and disappeared.

Ellery sat at the desk again, whistling softly to himself, a faraway look in his eyes.

The Inspector had MacKenzie, the store manager, brought to the library.

"Have you checked the employees, Mr. MacKenzie?"

"A report came through from my assistant a few moments ago." Ellery listened avidly. "So far as we have been able to determine," continued the Scotchman, referring to a paper in his hand, "all employees who checked in both yesterday and today were at their posts. As for today, everything seems perfectly regular in that connection. There is, of course, a list of absentees, which I have here. If you would like to follow up on these employees, here's the list."

"We'll have a peep at it," said the Inspector, taking the list from MacKenzie. He turned it over to a detective with a command. "Now, MacKenzie, you may start the ball rolling again. Store's routine is to go on as usual, but be careful that you say nothing at all of this whole business in your publicity. Have that window on Fifth Avenue kept closed and guarded until further orders. We'll have to seal it up anyway for a time. That's all. You're free to go."

"I'd like to ask the remaining directors a question, dad, if you haven't anything to quiz them about," said Ellery, after MacKenzie had left.

"I haven't a thought in my head about them—that I could turn to account," answered Queen. "Hesse, bring in Zorn, Marchbanks and Trask. Let's have another try at 'em."

The detective returned shortly with the three directors.

They looked peaked and ragged; Marchbanks was chewing savagely at a frayed cigar. The Inspector waved his hand at Ellery and retreated a step.

Ellery rose. "Just one question, gentlemen, and then I think Inspector Queen will permit you to go about your business."

"High time," muttered Trask, biting his lip.

"Mr. Zorn," said Ellery, ignoring the attenuated and foppish Trask, "is there a regular meeting-time for your Board of Directors?"

Zorn juggled his heavy gold watch-chain nervously. "Yes—yes, of course."

"If I'm not too inquisitive, when is that meeting-time?"

"Every other Friday afternoon."

"This is routine, strictly adhered to?"

"Yes—yes."

"How is it that there was a meeting this morning—on a Tuesday?"

"That was a special meeting. Mr. French calls them as the occasion demands."

"But the semi-monthly meetings are held regardless of special meetings?"

"Yes."

"I take it, then, that there was a meeting on Friday last?"

"Yes."

Ellery turned to Marchbanks and Trask. "Is Mr. Zorn's testimony substantially correct, gentlemen?"

Both nodded their heads sullenly. Ellery smiled, thanked them, and sat down. The Inspector smiled, thanked them, and told them politely that they were free to leave. He escorted them to the door and whispered to the policeman on guard an inaudible instruction. Zorn, Marchbanks and Trask left the private corridor immediately.

"There's an interesting feller outside, El," remarked the

Inspector. "Vincent Carmody, Mrs. French's first husband. Think I'll tackle him next.—Hesse, bring in Mr. Carmody in about two minutes."

"Did you check up at all on the night freight-entrance on 39th Street while you were downstairs?" asked Ellery.

"Sure did." The Inspector took a pinch of snuff reflectively. "That's a funny place, El. With the watchman and the truckman in the little booth, it would have been pie for somebody to slip into the building, especially at night. Went over it with particular thoroughness. It certainly looks like the answer to how the murderer gained entry last night."

"It may answer the question of how the murderer got in," remarked Ellery lazily, "but it doesn't answer the question of how he got out. That exit was closed to him by eleven-thirty. If he left the building by that door, then, he must have done so before eleven-thirty, eh?"

"But Mrs. French didn't get here until eleven-forty-five, El," objected the Inspector, "and according to Prouty she was killed about midnight. So how could he have left by that door before eleven-thirty?"

"The answer to that," said Ellery, "is that he couldn't, and therefore didn't. Is there a door through which he could have slipped into the main building from the freight room?"

"Nothing to it," growled the Inspector. "There's a door 'way back in the shadows of the room. It wasn't locked—never is—because these fools took it for granted that if the outer door was locked, the inner door didn't have to be. Anyway, it heads right onto a corridor which is parallel with the corridor that runs past the nightwatchman's office, but further into the body of the main floor.* In the darkness, it must have been ridiculously easy to slip through the door, sneak down that corridor, turn the cor-

* See diagram at frontispiece.

ner, and cover the thirty feet or so to the elevator and stairs. That's probably the answer."

"How about the master key in that office downstairs?" asked Ellery. "Did the day-man say anything about it?"

"Nothing there," replied the Inspector disconsolately. "O'Shane is his name, and he swears the key never left the locked drawer during his shift."

The door opened and Hesse escorted a preternaturally tall man with penetrating eyes and a straggly grey beard into the room. He was handsome in a sophisticated way, and striking. Ellery noted with interest the triangular lean jaw. The man was dressed carelessly, but in clothes of quality. He bowed stiffly to the Inspector and stood waiting. His eyes shifted luminously from man to man in the room.

"I had barely a chance of talking to you downstairs, Mr. Carmody," said the Inspector pleasantly. "There are a few things I want to ask you. Won't you sit down?"

Carmody dropped into a chair. He nodded curtly to Weaver as he caught the secretary's eye, but said nothing.

"Now, Mr. Carmody," began the Inspector, striding up and down before the desk at which Ellery sat quietly, "a few unimportant but necessary questions. Hagstrom, you're ready?" He cocked an eye at the detective, who nodded, notebook in hand. The Inspector resumed his march on the rug. Suddenly he looked up. Carmody's eyes burned deeply into thin air.

"Mr. Carmody," said the Inspector abruptly, "I understand that you are the sole owner of the Holbein Studios, dealing in antiques?"

"That is precisely correct," said Carmody. His voice was startling—low and vibrant and deliberate.

"You were married to Mrs. French, and divorced some seven years ago?"

"That is also correct." There was a finality in his tones that impinged unpleasantly on the ear. He emanated an aura of complete self-control.

"Have you seen Mrs. French since your divorce?"

"Yes. Many times."

"Socially? There was no particular unpleasantness in your relations?"

"None whatever. Yes, I met Mrs. French socially."

The Inspector was slightly nettled. This witness answered exactly what he was asked, and no more.

"How often, Mr. Carmody?"

"As often as twice a week during the social season."

"And you last saw her—"

"A week ago Monday evening, at a dinner given by Mrs. Standish Prince at Mrs. Prince's home."

"You spoke to her?"

"Yes." Carmody stirred. "Mrs. French was very much interested in antiques, an interest cultivated perhaps during our marriage." The man seemed made of steel. He showed not the faintest trace of emotion. "We conversed for a time about a Chippendale chair she was particularly anxious to have."

"Anything else, Mr. Carmody?"

"Yes. About our daughter."

"Ah!" The Inspector pursed his lips, pulled at his mustache. "Miss Bernice Carmody was placed in the custody of your wife after your divorce?"

"Yes."

"You have seen your daughter periodically, perhaps?"

"Yes. Although Mrs. French secured custody of my daughter, our informal arrangement at the time of our divorce was that I might see the child at any time." A warm color floated into his voice. The Inspector regarded him quickly, looked away. He plunged into a new line of questioning.

"Mr. Carmody, can you suggest any possible explanation to account for this crime?"

"No, I cannot." Carmody grew colder at once. For no apparent reason his eyes shifted to Ellery, and held there intently for an instant.

"Had Mrs. French any enemies, to your knowledge?"

"No. She was singularly free from the profundity of character which so often breeds animosity in others." Carmody might have been talking of an utter stranger; his tone, his bearing were wholly impersonal.

"Not even yourself, Mr. Carmody?" asked the Inspector softly.

"Not even myself, Inspector," said Carmody in the same frozen tones. "If it is any concern of yours, my love for my wife dwindled during our wedded life and when it had entirely disappeared, I secured a divorce. I felt no bitterness toward her then, nor do I now. You will, of course," he added without a change in inflection, "have to take my word for that."

"Did Mrs. French seem nervous the last few times you saw her? Did anything seem to be troubling her? Did she give you any clue to a possible secret worry?"

"Our conversations, Inspector, were hardly of so intimate a nature. I noticed nothing unusual about her. Mrs. French was an extraordinarily prosaic person. Not at all the worrying kind, I can assure you."

The Inspector paused, Carmody sat quietly. Then he spoke, without warning, without passion. He merely opened his mouth and began to speak, but it was so unexpected that the Inspector started violently and took a hasty pinch of snuff to conceal his agitation.

"Inspector, you are evidently questioning me with the secret hope that I may have something to do with the crime, or that I may be in the possession of vital information. Inspector, you are wasting your time." Carmody leaned

forward, his eyes strangely blazing. "Believe me when I say that I haven't the slightest interest either in the live Mrs. French—or the dead Mrs. French. Or the whole damned French tribe put together. My own concern is with my daughter. I understand that she is missing. If she is, there has been foul play. If you have any idea in your head that my daughter is a matricide, the more fool you. . . . You will be perpetrating a crime against an innocent girl if you do not immediately seek to discover Bernice's present whereabouts and the reason for her disappearance. And in that connection, you are welcome to my unstinting co-operation. If you do not look for her immediately, I shall set private detectives on her trail. I think that is all."

Carmody rose to his astonishing height and stood immovably waiting.

The Inspector stirred. "I should advise a slight softening of tone in the future, Mr. Carmody," he said dryly. "You may go."

Without another word the antique dealer turned and left the apartment.

"Well, what do you think of Mr. Carmody?" asked Queen quizzically.

"I've never known an antiquarian who wasn't queer in some way," laughed Ellery. "Cool customer, however. . . . Dad, I should very much like to see Monsieur Lavery again."

The Frenchman was pale and nervous when he was conducted into the library. He seemed excessively tired and sank into a chair at once, stretching his long legs with a sigh.

"You might have provided chairs outside in the corridor," he said reproachfully to the Inspector. "My good fortune to be the last called! *C'est la vie, hein?*" He shrugged his shoulders humorously. "May I smoke, Inspector?"

He lit a cigaret without waiting for a reply.

Ellery rose and shook himself vigorously. He looked at Lavery, and Lavery looked at him, and both smiled for no apparent reason.

"I shall be brutally frank, Mr. Lavery," drawled Ellery. "You are a man of the world. You will not be constrained by a false sense of discretion. . . . Mr. Lavery, have you ever suspected during your stay with the Frenches, that Bernice Carmody is a drug addict?"

Lavery started, regarded Ellery with alert eyes. "You have discovered that already? And without seeing the girl? My felicitations, Mr. Queen. . . . To your question, let me reply without hesitation—yes."

"Oh, I say!" protested Weaver suddenly, from his corner. "How could you know, Lavery? On such a short acquaintance?"

"I know the symptoms, Weaver," said Lavery mildly. "The sallow, almost saffron complexion; the slightly protruding eyeballs; the bad teeth; the unnatural nervousness and excitability; a certain air of furtiveness constantly maintained; the sudden hysteria and the more sudden recovery; the excessive thinness, growing more patent with every passing day—no, it was not difficult to diagnose the young lady's ailment." He turned to Ellery with a quick gesture of his thin fingers. "Let me make it perfectly clear that my opinion is just an opinion, little more. I have no definite evidence of any kind. But, short of medical advice to the contrary, I should be ready as a layman to swear that the girl is a drug fiend in an advanced stage!"

Weaver groaned. "The Old Man—"

"Of course, we're all terribly sorry about that," put in the Inspector quickly. "You suspected her of being an addict at once, Mr. Lavery?"

"From the moment I laid eyes on her," said the Frenchman emphatically. "It was a source of constant astonish-

ment to me that more people did not observe what was so perfectly plain to me."

"Perhaps they did—perhaps they did," muttered Ellery, brows drawn taut. He brushed a vagrant thought away and addressed Lavery once more.

"Have you ever been in this room before, Mr. Lavery?" he asked, à propos of nothing.

"In Mr. French's apartment?" cried Lavery. "Why, every day, sir. Mr. French has been more than kind, and I have used this room incessantly since my arrival in New York."

"Then there is nothing more to be said," Ellery smiled. "You may now retire to your lecture-room, if it isn't too late, and carry on the grand work of continentalizing America. Good day, sir!"

Lavery bowed, showed his white teeth all around, and left the apartment with long strides.

Ellery sat down at the desk and wrote earnestly on the flyleaf of his sadly abused little book.

19

OPINIONS AND REPORTS

Inspector Queen stood Napoleonically in the center of the library, staring vindictively at the anteroom door. He muttered to himself, turning his head slowly from side to side like a terrier.

He beckoned to Crouther, the head store detective, who was assisting one of the photographers at the door of the cardroom.

"Look here, Cróuther, you ought to be in a good position to know about this." The Inspector filled his nostrils with snuff. The burly store detective scraped his jaw expectantly. "Seeing that door there reminded me. What in heaven's name was French's idea in having a special

spring lock put on the corridor door? Seems to me that for an apartment only occasionally used this is pretty well guarded."

Crouther grinned deprecatingly. "Now don't go bothering your head about that, Inspector. The old boy's just a bug on privacy, that's all. Hates to be interrupted—that's a fact."

"But a burglar-proof lock in a burglar-proof building!"

"Well," said Crouther, "you either have to take him that way or go nuts. Matter of fact, Inspector," he lowered his voice, "he's always been a little queer on some subjects. I can remember like today the morning I got a written order from the boss, with signatures and a lot of that bunk, requisitioning a specially made lock. That was when they were remodeling the apartment, about two years ago. So I followed my orders and had an expert locksmith manufacture the dingus on that outside door. Boss liked it pretty much, too—was happy as an Irish cop."

"How about this business of setting a man at the door?" demanded the Inspector. "Certainly that lock would keep out anybody who wasn't wanted."

"We-ell," said Crouther hesitantly, "the boss is such a bug on this privacy business that he didn't even want knocks on the door. Guess that's why he asked me for a man to stand guard every once in a while. Always kept the boys in the corridor, too—they hate the job, the whole crew of 'em. Couldn't even come into the anteroom and sit down."

The Inspector scowled down at his regulation policeman's boots for a moment and crooked his finger at Weaver.

"Come here, my boy." Weaver trudged wearily across the rug. "Just what's behind French's craze for privacy? From what Crouther tells me, this place is like a fortress most times. Who in heaven's name is allowed in here besides his family?"

"It's just an idiosyncrasy of the Old Man's, Inspector," said Weaver. "Don't take it too seriously. He's a good deal of an eccentric. Very few people see the inside of this apartment. Apart from myself, the immediate family, the Board of Directors, and during the last month Mr. Lavery, practically no one in the store organization is allowed in here. No, that's not quite true. MacKenzie, the store manager, is called in occasionally to get direct orders from the Old Man—was in last week, in fact. But aside from MacKenzie, this place is a complete mystery to the store forces."

"You tell 'em, Mr. Weaver," put in Crouther jocularly.

"And that's how it is, Inspector," continued Weaver. "Not even Crouther has been here in the past few years."

"Last time I saw this place before this morning," amended Crouther, "was two years ago when they were redecorating and refurnishing it." He grew red in the face at the thought of some secret injury. "That's a heck of a way to treat a head store detective, believe me."

"You ought to work for the City, Crouther," said the Inspector grimly. "Shut up and be satisfied with a soft job!"

"I should explain, if I haven't done so before," added Weaver, "that the taboo is more or less limited to employees. A great many people come here, but most of the visits are strictly by appointment with the Old Man, and his visitors come on Anti-Vice League business. Clergymen, most of them. A few politicians, not many."

"That's a fact," put in Crouther.

"Well!" The Inspector shot a keen glance toward the two men before him. "It looks mighty bad for this Carmody girl, eh? What do you think?"

Weaver looked pained and half-turned away.

"Well, I don't know about that, Inspector," said

Crouther with heavy importance. "My own ideas about this case—"

"Eh? Your own ideas?" The Inspector looked startled, then suppressed a smile. "What *are* your own ideas, Crouther? Might be of some value—never can tell."

Ellery, who had been sitting abstractedly at the desk, listening to the conversation with half-cocked ears, jammed his little volume into his pocket, rose, and sauntered idly over to the group.

"What's this? A post-mortem?" he demanded, smiling. "And what do I hear, Crouther, about an idea of yours on the case?"

Crouther looked embarrassed for a moment and shuffled his feet. But then he squared his thick shoulders and lashed out into speech, openly enjoying his rôle of orator.

"I think," he began—

"Ah!" said the Inspector.

"I think," Crouther repeated, unabashed, "that Miss Carmody is a victim. Yes, sir, victim of a frame-up!"

"No!" murmured Ellery.

"Go on," said the Inspector curiously.

"It's as plain as the nose—beg pardon, Inspector—on your face. Who ever heard of a girl bumping her own mother off? It ain't natural."

"But the cards, Crouther—the shoes, the hat," said the Inspector gently.

"Just hooley, Inspector," said Crouther with confidence. "Hell! That's no trick, to plant a pair o' shoes and a hat. No, sir, you can't tell me Miss Carmody did the job. Don't believe it and won't believe it. I go on common sense, and that's a fact. Girl shoot her own mother! No, sir!"

"Well, there's something in that," remarked the Inspector sententiously. "What do you make of Miss Marion French's scarf, while you're analyzing the crime, Crouther? Think she's mixed up in it anywhere?"

"Who? That little girl?" Crouther expanded, snorted. "Say, that's another plant. Or else she left it here by mistake. Kind o' like the plant idea, though, myself. Fact!"

"You would say, then," interpolated Ellery, "while you're on the Holmesian track, that this is a case of—what?"

"Don't get you entirely, sir," said Crouther stoutly, "but it looks darned near like a case of murder and kidnapping. Can't see any other way to explain it."

"Murder and kidnapping?" Ellery smiled. "Not a bad idea at that. Good recitation, Crouther."

The detective beamed. Weaver, who had resolutely refrained from commenting, heaved a sigh of relief when a knock on the outer door interrupted the conversation.

The policeman stationed outside opened the door to admit a weazened little man, completely bald, carrying a bulging brief-case.

"Afternoon, Jimmy!" said the Inspector cheerfully. "Got anything for us in that bag of yours?"

"Sure have, Inspector," squeaked the little old man. "Got down here as fast as I could.—Hello, Mr. Queen."

"Glad to see you, Jimmy," said Ellery, and the expression on his face was one of intense expectancy. At this moment the photographers and fingerprint investigators trooped into the library, hats and coats on, their apparatus stowed away. "Jimmy" greeted them all by name.

"Through here, Inspector," announced one of the photographers. "Any orders?"

"Not at the moment." Queen turned to the fingerprint men. "Anybody find anything?"

"Got a lot of prints," reported one of them, "but practically all came from this room. Not a one in the card-room and none in the bedroom, except for a few stray prints of Mr. Queen's, here."

"Anything in the prints from this room?"

"Hard to say. If the room's been used all morning by this Board of Directors, chances are they're all legitimate. We'll have to get hold of these people and check their prints. Okay, Inspector?"

"Go ahead. But be nice about it, boys." He waved them toward the door. "So long, Crouther. See you later."

"Good enough," said Crouther cheerfully, and departed behind the police workers.

The Inspector, Weaver, the man called "Jimmy," and Ellery were left standing in the center of the room. The detectives personally attached to Queen lounged about in the anteroom, conversing in low tones. The old man carefully closed the anteroom door and hurried back toward the group, rubbing his hands briskly together.

"Now, Mr. Weaver—" he began.

"Perfectly all right, dad," said Ellery mildly. "No secrets from Wes. Jimmy, if you've anything to tell, tell it rapidly, graphically, and above all rapidly. Talk, James!"

"Okay," responded "Jimmy," scratching his bald pate dubiously. "What would you like to know?" His hand dived into the bag he carried and reappeared with an article painstakingly wrapped in soft tissue paper. He carefully unwrapped the package, and one of the onyx book-ends emerged. The second book-end, similarly sheathed in tissue, he placed by the side of the first on the glass top of French's desk.

"The book-ends, eh?" muttered Queen, bending forward curiously to examine the barely visible glue-lines where felt and stone met.

"In the onyx itself," ventured Ellery. "Jimmy, what were those whitish grains I sent you in the glassine envelope?"

"Ordinary fingerprint powder," replied "Jimmy," at

once. "The white variety. And how it got there, maybe you can answer—I can't, Mr. Queen."

"Not at the moment," smiled Ellery. "Fingerprint powder, eh? Did you find any more in the blue?"

"You got nearly all of them," said the little bald-headed man. "Did find a few, though. Found a bit of foreign matter, of course—some dust chiefly. But the grains are what I've told you. There's not a print on either of them, except your own, Mr. Queen."

Inspector Queen stared from "Jimmy" to Weaver to Ellery, a strange light dawning on his face. His hand fumbled nervously for his snuff-box.

"Fingerprint powder!" he said in a stunned voice. "Is it possible that—?"

"No, I've checked on what you're thinking, dad," said Ellery soberly. "This room was not entered by the police before I myself found the grains in the glue. As a matter of fact, I suspected their identity at once, but of course I wished to be certain. . . . No, if you're thinking that one of your men sprinkled the powder on these book-ends, you're mistaken. They couldn't have, possibly."

"You realize what this means, of course?" The Inspector's voice grew shrill with excitement. He took a short turn on the rug. "I have had all sorts of experience," he said, "with criminals who use gloves. That's one of the accepted habits of the law-breaking profession, it seems—maybe it's an outgrowth of fiction and newspaper exposés. Gloves, canvas, cheesecloth, felt—they're all used either to prevent leaving fingerprints or to destroy what prints may be left. But this—this is the work of a—"

"A super-criminal?" suggested Weaver timidly.

"Exactly. A super-criminal!" replied the old man. "Sounds dime-novelish, does it, El? Coming from me, too—with comparative butchers like Tony the Wop and Red McCloskey waiting for me down at the Tombs. Most cops

scoff at the mere suggestion of super-criminals. But I've known them—rare and precious birds when they do crop out. . . .” He looked at his son defiantly. “Ellery, the man—or woman, for that matter—who committed this crime is not the usual criminal. He—or she—is so careful as to do the job and then, not satisfied with possibly using gloves and letting it go at that, sprinkles the room with the policeman's pet crime-detector, fingerprint powder, to bring out his or her *own* prints, in order to wipe them out of existence! . . . There isn't the slightest doubt in my mind—we're dealing with a most unusual character, a habitual criminal who's risen far above the stupidity of his generally dull-witted kind.”

“Super-criminal . . .” Ellery thought for a moment, then shrugged his shoulders lightly. “It does look that way, doesn't it? . . . Commits the murder in this room, then goes about the enormously ticklish job of cleaning up afterward. Has he left prints? Perhaps. Perhaps the work he had to do was so delicate as to make it impossible for him to use gloves—there's a thought, eh, dad?” He smiled.

“Doesn't make sense, though—that last,” muttered Queen. “Can't see what he might possibly have to do that he couldn't do with gloves on.”

“I have a little idea about that,” remarked Ellery. “But to go on. He hasn't used gloves, let us say, at least for one small but important operation, and he's certain that there are prints of his fingers left on the book-ends—which of necessity, then, are connected with what he had to do. Very well! Does he merely wipe the surface of the onyx carefully, trusting that he's eradicated all the tell-tale marks? He does not! He produces fingerprint powder, whisks it gently over all the surfaces of the onyx, one at a time, and where he sees a convolular smudge, he immediately destroys it. In this way he's *sure* there are no finger-

prints left. Smart! A little painstaking, of course—but he was gambling with his life, remember, and he took no chances. No—” Ellery said slowly, “he took—no chances.”

There was a little silence, broken only by the soft swish of “Jimmy’s” hand caressing his bald head.

“At least,” said the Inspector impatiently, at last, “there’s no sense in looking for prints anywhere about. The criminal who was clever enough to go through a rigmarole like this would be mighty sure he left none. So—let’s forget it for the moment and get back to some personalities. Jimmy, wrap those book-ends up again and take them back to Headquarters with you. Better have one of the boys go along with you—let’s take no chances on your, well, let’s say, losing ’em.”

“Right, Inspector.” The police laboratory worker deftly rewrapped the book-ends in the tissue paper, stowed them away in his bag, and with a cheery, “So long!” disappeared from the room.

“Now, Mr. Weaver,” said the Inspector, settling himself comfortably in a chair, “have a seat and let’s hear some things about the various people we’ve met in the course of this investigation. Sit down, Ellery, you make me fidgety!”

Ellery smiled and seated himself at the desk, for which he seemed to have developed a curious passion. Weaver relaxed in one of the leather-covered chairs, resignedly.

“Anything you say, Inspector.” He looked over at Ellery. Ellery was gazing fixedly at the books on the desk-top.

“Well, for an introduction,” began the Inspector briskly, “tell us something about that employer of yours. Mighty queer cuss, isn’t he? Anti-vice work made him daffy, perhaps?”

“I think you’ve judged the Old Man a trifle inaccurately,” said Weaver tiredly. “He’s the best and most generous soul in the world. If you can conceive a strange

combination of Arthurian purity of nature with a definite narrowness of outlook, you'll hit close to understanding him. He's not a broad-minded man, in the generally accepted sense of the word. He has a little iron in him, too, or he wouldn't be crusading against vice. He loathes it instinctively, I think, because certainly there's never been the smallest element of scandal or criminality in his family. That's why this thing has hit him so hard. He probably foresees the ravenous way in which the newspapers will pick up the choice morsel—wife of the Anti-Vice League head mysteriously murdered, and all that. And then, too, I think he loved Mrs. French dearly. I don't think she loved him—" he hesitated, but continued loyally, "but she was always good to him in her cold, self-contained way. She was a good bit younger than he, of course."

The Inspector coughed gently. Ellery regarded Weaver with morose eyes, but his thoughts seemed far away. Perhaps on the books, for his fingers played idly with their covers.

"Tell me, Mr. Weaver," said Queen, "have you noticed anything—well, abnormal—in Mr. French's actions lately? Or better still, do you know personally of anything that might have caused him secret worry in recent months?"

Weaver was silent for a long time. "Inspector," he said at last, meeting Queen's eyes frankly, "the truth is that I know a great many things about Mr. French and his family and friends. I'm not a scandal-monger. You must understand that this is an extremely embarrassing position for me. It's hard to betray confidences. . . ."

The Inspector looked pleased. "Spoken like a man, Mr. Weaver. Ellery, answer your friend."

Ellery regarded Weaver compassionately. "Wes, old boy," he said, "a human being has been killed in cold blood. It is our business to punish the murderer who took that life. I can't answer for you—it's difficult for a straight-

thinking man to spill a heap of family secrets—but if I were you, I should talk. Because, Wes”—he paused—“you’re not with policemen. You’re with friends.”

“Then I’ll talk,” said Weaver despairingly, “and hope for the best.—I believe you asked about something abnormal in the Old Man’s actions recently, Inspector? You’ve hit a truth. Mr. French is secretly worried and upset. Because—”

“Because—?”

“Because,” said Weaver in a spiritless voice, “a few months ago an unfortunate friendship sprang up between Mrs. French and—Cornelius Zorn.”

“Zorn, eh? Love-affair, Weaver?” asked Queen in a soothing voice.

“I’m afraid so,” replied Weaver uncomfortably. “Though what she saw in *him*— But now I’m becoming gossipy! The fact is that they were seeing each other much too often, so much so that even the Old Man, the most unsuspecting soul that ever breathed, began to realize that something was wrong.”

“Nothing definite, I suppose?”

“I don’t think there was anything radically wrong, Inspector. And of course Mr. French never breathed a word of it to his wife. He wouldn’t dream of hurting her feelings. But I know it touched him deeply, because once he let slip something in my presence that gave all his transparent broodings away. I’m reasonably certain that he was desperately hoping things would work out for the best.”

“I thought Zorn held aloof from French in that window,” mused the Inspector.

“Undoubtedly. Zorn makes no bones about his feeling for Mrs. French. She was not an unattractive woman, Inspector. And Zorn is pretty small potatoes. He broke a lifelong friendship when he began to dally with the Old

Man's wife. It's that, I think, as much as anything, that made the Old Man feel so badly."

"Is Zorn married?" put in Ellery suddenly.

"Why, yes, El," replied Weaver, facing his friend for the moment. "Sophia Zorn's a queer woman, too. I think she hated Mrs. French—not the slightest feminine sympathy in her make-up. Pretty objectionable character, that woman."

"Does she love Zorn?"

"That's hard to answer. She has an abnormal streak of possessiveness, and that may be why she was so jealous. She showed it at every opportunity and made things quite uncomfortable for all of us at times."

"I suppose," put in the Inspector with a grim smile, "it's common knowledge. Those things always are."

"Much too common," said Weaver bitterly. "It's been a hideous farce, the whole business. My God, there have been times when I was tempted to strangle Mrs. French myself for the ghastly wreck she was making out of the Old Man!"

"Well, don't make that statement when the Commissioner is around, Weaver," smiled the Inspector. "What is French's feeling for his immediate family?"

"Of course he loved Mrs. French—was uncommonly thoughtful in the little things for a man of his age," said Weaver. "As for Marion"—his eyes brightened—"she's always been the apple of his eye. A perfect love between father and daughter. . . . It's been a little unpleasant—for me," he added in a lower tone.

"So I gathered from the coldness with which you two kids habitually greet each other," remarked the Inspector dryly. Weaver flushed boyishly. "Now, how about Bernice?"

"Bernice and Mr. French?" Weaver sighed. "About what you would expect under the circumstances. If the

Old Man's anything, he's fair. Almost leans over backward in that respect. Of course, Bernice is not his daughter—he couldn't love her as he loves Marion, for instance. But he treats them exactly alike. They get equally as much of his attention, the same allowance for pin-money and clothes—not the slightest difference in their status as far as he is concerned. But—well, one is his daughter, and the other is his stepdaughter."

"And there," said Ellery with a little chuckle, "is a pointed epigram. Tell us, Wes—how about Mrs. French and Carmody? You've heard what he said—does it all fit?"

"He told the exact truth," replied Weaver at once. "He's an enigma of a man, is Carmody—cold-blooded as a fish except where Bernice is concerned. I think he'd give his shirt for her. But he treated Mrs. French after their divorce precisely as if she were an unavoidable social necessity."

"Why were they divorced, by the way?" asked the Inspector.

"Infidelity on Carmody's part," said Weaver.—"Good night! I feel like a tongue-slapping washerwoman.—Well, Carmody was so injudicious as to be caught in a hotel-room with a lady of the chorus, and though the affair was hushed up, the truth couldn't be kept from trickling out. Mrs. French, who was something of a moral virago in those days, immediately sued for divorce, and got it—and with it, custody of Bernice."

"Hardly a moral virago, Wes," remarked Ellery. "Not from the Zornian implications. Say rather—she knew what side her bread was buttered on and decided that there were more fish in the sea than a faithless husband. . . ."

"A complicated figure of speech," said Weaver, with a smile. "But I see what you mean."

"I'm beginning to get little sidelights into Mrs. French's

character," murmured Ellery. "This Marchbanks fellow—her brother, I believe?"

"And that's about all," said Weaver grimly. "Hated each other like poison. I think Marchbanks had her number. He's no glistening lily himself. Anyway, they never had much use for each other. It made it a little embarrassing for the Old Man, because Marchbanks had been on the Board for many years."

"Drinks too much, that's plain," said the Inspector. "Marchbanks and French get along all right?"

"They have very little contact socially," said Weaver. "In business, they seem to jibe nicely. But that's because the Old Man's so darned sensible."

"There's only one other member of the cast about whom I have any curiosity at the moment," said the Inspector. "And that's the dissipated-looking, fashionable gentleman of the Board named Trask. Has he any contacts with the French family other than business?"

"More 'other' than 'business,'" replied Weaver. "I may as well go the whole hog while I'm tattling. I'll need a scrubbing-brush after I'm through!—Mr. A. Melville Trask is on the Board purely as a result of tradition. His father was the original member, and it was the elder Trask's dying wish that his son succeed him. It meant loads of red tape, but finally they succeeded in dragging him in, where he's been an ornament ever since. Not a brain in his head. But shrewdness?—plenty! Because Mr. Trask has been gunning for Bernice for over a year now—ever since he was elected to the Board, as a matter of fact."

"Interesting," murmured Ellery. "What's the idea, Wes—the family fortune?"

"You've hit it exactly. Old Man Trask lost a lot in the stock market, and his son has been plunging so heavily that the report is he's near the end of his rope financially. So I guess he figured his best bet was a fortuitous marriage.

And that's where Bernice comes in. He's been hounding her, courting her, taking her out, flattering her mother for months now. He's wormed his way into the affections of Bernice—who has few enough admirers, poor kid!—so much so that they're virtually engaged. Nothing official, but that's the understanding."

"Opposition?" demanded the Inspector.

"Plenty," replied Weaver grimly. "Chiefly from the Old Man. He feels it his duty to protect his stepdaughter from a man of Trask's stamp. Trask is a cad and a rounder of the worst sort. The poor girl would lead a dog's life with him."

"Wes, what makes him so sure she'll come into money?" asked Ellery suddenly.

"Well"—Weaver hesitated—"you see, El, Mrs. French had a respectable wad herself. And, of course, it's been an open secret that when she died—"

"It would go to Bernice," said the Inspector.

"Interesting," said Ellery, rising to his full length and stretching wearily. "And for no reason at all, I'm reminded that I haven't had a bite to eat since this morning. Let's all go out for a sandwich and a sip of java. Anything more, dad?"

"Can't think of a thing," said the old man with a return to his glumness. "We'll lock up and go. Hagstrom! Hesse! Get those cigaret stubs and cards into my own bags—and the shoes and hat, too. . . ."

Ellery picked up the five books from the desk and handed them to Hagstrom.

"You might pack these, too, Hagstrom," he said. "You're taking these things to Headquarters, dad?"

"Why, of course!"

"Then, on reconsideration, Hagstrom, I'll take these books myself." The detective wrapped them carefully in a piece of brown paper he took from one of the police kits

and returned them to Ellery. Weaver retrieved his hat and coat from one of the bedroom closets and the Inspector, Ellery and Weaver, preceded by the detectives, walked out of the apartment.

Ellery was the last one out. As he stood in the corridor, one hand on the knob of the outer door, he looked slowly from the apartment to the brown-papered package in his hand.

"Thus endeth," he said softly to himself, "the first lesson." His hand dropped and the door snapped shut.

Two minutes later only a lone bluecoat was left in the corridor, propped up against the door in a nondescript chair he had appropriated somewhere, reading a tabloid newspaper.

THE THIRD EPISODE

"Manhunting is by all odds the most thrilling profession in the world. Its thrills . . . are in exact proportion to the temperament of the manhunter. It reaches its completest fulfillment in the investigator who . . . observing microscopically the phenomena of a crime and collating them precisely, exercises his God-given gift of imagination and concocts a theory which embraces ALL the phenomena and omits none, not the tiniest crumb of a fact. . . . Penetration, patience, and passion—these rarely combined qualities make the genius of criminal investigation, just as they make the genius of any profession, unless the extra-mundane arts be excepted. . . ."

—From *THERE IS AN UNDER WORLD*

By James Redix (the Elder).

CYRUS FRENCH's house fronted the Hudson River, on lower Riverside Drive. It was old and dusky, set well back from the Drive and surrounded by primly kept shrubbery. A low iron fence ran around the property.

When Inspector Queen, Ellery Queen and Westley Weaver entered the reception room, they found Sergeant Velie already there, engaged in earnest conversation with another detective. This man left immediately on the entrance of the small party, and Velie himself turned a perturbed face to his superior.

"We've struck oil, Inspector," he said in his calm bass. "Managed to trace the cab that picked up Mrs. French last night almost at once. It was a Yellow that patrols this neighborhood regularly. Got the driver and he remembered his fare without any trouble."

"And I suppose—" began the Inspector gloomily.

Velie shrugged. "Nothing to brag about. He picked her up right in front of the house here at about twenty after eleven last night. She told him to take her down Fifth. He followed orders. At 39th Street she told him to pull up, and then she got out. Paid him and he beat it. He did see her cross the street toward the department store. That's all."

"Not so much," murmured Ellery, "to be sure. Did he stop at all on the trip downtown—did she communicate with any one on the way?"

"I asked him that. Nothing doing, Mr. Queen. She didn't give him another order until they reached 39th Street. Of course, he did say that there was heavy traffic,

and he had to stop a number of times. It's possible that somebody might have hopped in and out of the cab during a traffic wait. But the driver says no, he didn't see anything wrong."

"And if he's alert, he would have, naturally," said the Inspector, sighing.

A maid took their hats and coats, and immediately afterward Marion French appeared. She squeezed Weaver's hand, smiled wanly at the Queens, and placed herself at their disposal.

"No, Miss French, there's nothing we can do with you now," said the Inspector. "How is Mr. French?"

"Loads better." She made a little *moué* of apology. "I did act frightfully at the apartment, Inspector Queen. I know you'll forgive me—seeing father faint made me lose control of myself."

"Nothing to forgive, Marion," growled Weaver, "if I do take the words out of the Inspector's mouth. I don't think Inspector Queen quite realized how ill your father really was."

"Now, now, Mr. Weaver," said the Inspector mildly. "Miss French, do you think Mr. French will be able to see us in a half hour or so?"

"Well . . . If the doctor says so, Inspector. But goodness! Won't you sit down? I've been so upset by all this—confusion. . . ." A shadow darkened her face. The men accepted chairs. "You see, Inspector," continued Marion, "there's a nurse with daddy, and the doctor's still here. An old friend. Mr. Gray, too. Shall I see?"

"If you will, my dear. And would you mind having Miss Hortense Underhill come in for a moment?"

When Marion had left the room, Weaver excused himself and hurried after her. Her startled "Why, Westley!" could just be heard from the main hall a moment later.

There was a sudden silence, then a suspiciously soft sound, and finally retreating footfalls.

"I think," said Ellery soberly, "that that was a luscious salute to the Venerian goddess. . . . I wonder why old Cyrus frowns upon Westley as a prospective son-in-law. Wants wealth and position, I suppose."

"Does he?" asked the Inspector.

"I gather so."

"Well, that's neither here nor there." The Inspector delicately took snuff. "Thomas," he said, "what have you done about Bernice Carmody? Any traces?"

Velie pulled a longer face than usual. "Just one, and it barely helps us to a start. The Carmody girl was seen yesterday afternoon leaving this house by a day watchman—special officer—who's privately employed to patrol the neighborhood. He knows the girl by sight. He saw her walk quickly down towards 72nd Street—straight down the Drive. She didn't meet any one, apparently, and was headed for a definite place, because she seemed in a hell of a hurry. He had no reason to give her more than a casual glance or two, and so couldn't tell me just how far down the Drive she went or whether she turned down a side street."

"Worse and worse." The Inspector grew thoughtful. "That girl is almighty important, Thomas," he sighed. "Put extra men on her trail if you think it's necessary. We've got to find her. I suppose you've got a complete description, clothes and all?"

Velie nodded. "Yes, and four men on her already. If there's anything at all, Inspector, we'll find it."

Hortense Underhill clumped into the room.

Ellery sprang to his feet. "Dad, this is Miss Underhill, the housekeeper. This is Inspector Queen, Miss Underhill. The Inspector has a few questions to ask you."

"That's what I'm here for," said the housekeeper.

"Um," said the Inspector, eying her keenly. "My son tells me, Miss Underhill, that Miss Bernice Carmody left this house yesterday afternoon against her mother's wishes—in fact, sneaked out behind her back. Is that correct?"

"That's correct," snapped the housekeeper, with a malevolent glance toward Ellery, who was smiling. "Though what *that* has to do with it, I can't see."

"No doubt," said the old man. "Was that Miss Carmody's usual procedure—to run away from her mother?"

"I haven't the faintest notion of what you're driving at, Mr. Inspector," said the housekeeper coldly. "But if you're aiming to implicate that girl . . . Well! Yes, she did that a few times a month. Slipped out of the house without a word and was gone usually about three hours. There was always a scene with Mrs. French when she returned."

"I don't suppose you know," asked Ellery slowly, "where she went at such times? Or what Mrs. French said to her when she returned?"

Hortense Underhill clicked her teeth disagreeably. "No. Neither did her mother. That's why they had a scene. And Bernice would never tell. Just sit calmly and let her mother rave. . . . Except, of course, last week. Then they *did* have a scene."

"Oh, something extraordinary a week ago, eh?" said Ellery. "And I gather that Mrs. French *did* know then?"

The housekeeper permitted an expression of surprise to flick across her hard features. "Yes, I think she did," she said more quietly than before. She favored Ellery with a suddenly interested glance. "But what it was I don't know. I think she found out where Bernice was going, and they quarreled about it."

"Just when was this, Miss Underhill?" asked the Inspector.

"A week ago Monday."

Ellery whistled softly to himself. He and the Inspector exchanged glances.

The Inspector leaned forward. "Tell me, Miss Underhill—these days on which Miss Carmody generally disappeared—do you recall whether they were all the same, or different days?"

Hortense Underhill looked from father to son, began to speak, thought for an instant, looked up again. "Now that I think of it," she said slowly, "they weren't always Mondays. I remember a Tuesday, a Wednesday, and a Thursday. . . . I do believe she went every week on consecutive days! Now, what could that mean?"

"More, Miss Underhill," replied Ellery, frowning, "than you can guess—or I, for that matter. . . . Have the bedrooms of Mrs. French and Miss Carmody been disturbed since this morning?"

"No. When I heard about the murder at the store I locked up both bedrooms. I didn't know but that—"

"That it might have been important, Miss Underhill?" said Ellery. "That was clever of you. . . . Will you please lead the way upstairs?"

The housekeeper rose without a word and walked out into the main hall and up the broad central staircase, the three men following. She stopped on the second floor and opened a door with a key from a bunch in her black silk apron-pocket.

"This is Bernice's room," she announced, and stepped aside.

They entered a large green-and-ivory bedroom, ornately furnished with period furniture. A huge canopied bed dominated the room. Despite the mirrors and colors and exotic pieces, the room was unaccountably depressing. It looked cold. The sunbeams that streamed in through the three wide windows, far from lending warmth to the en-

semble, in some grotesque way only heightened the general effect of cheerlessness.

Ellery's eyes, as he stepped into the room, were not concerned with its eeriness. They focused immediately on a large, garishly carved table to the side of the bed, on which was an ashtray filled to overflowing with cigaret stubs. He quickly crossed the room and picked up the tray. Then he put it back on the table with a curious gleam in his eye.

"Was this tray with its cigaret stubs here this morning when you locked up, Miss Underhill?" he asked sharply.

"Yes. I didn't touch anything."

"Then this room hasn't been tidied since Sunday?"

The housekeeper flushed. "The room was attended to on Monday morning, after Bernice awoke," she snarled. "I will *not* hear any imputations against my household, Mr. Queen! I—"

"But why not Monday afternoon?" interposed Ellery, smiling.

"Because Bernice chased the maid out of the room after the bed was made, that's why!" snapped the housekeeper. "The girl didn't have time to empty the ashtray. I hope that satisfies you!"

"It does," murmured Ellery. "Dad—Velie—come here a moment."

Ellery silently pointed down to the cigaret stubs. There were at least thirty on the tray. Without exception the cigarets, of a flat Turkish variety, had been smoked only one-quarter of their length, and crushed out against the tray. The Inspector picked one up, and peered at a word of gilt lettering near the tip.

"Well, what's surprising about that?" he demanded. "They're the same brand as the ones on the card-table in the apartment. Girl must be frightfully nervous, though."

"But the length, dad, the length," said Ellery softly.

"However, no matter. . . . Miss Underhill, has Miss Carmody always smoked *La Duchesse*?"

"Yes, *sir*," said the housekeeper unpleasantly. "And too many for her health, too. She gets them from some Greek person with an outlandish name—Xanthos, I think it is—who makes them up on special order for young ladies of the better classes. Perfumed, they are!"

"A standing order, I suppose?"

"You suppose correctly. When Bernice's supply ran out, she merely repeated her order, which was for a box of five hundred always. . . . That's one thing about Bernice, although you mustn't take it as anything against the poor child, because too many young ladies have the same pernicious habit—but she smokes altogether too much for propriety and health, too. Her mother never smoked, nor do Marion and Mr. French."

"Yes, yes, we are aware of those facts, Miss Underhill, thank you." Ellery took a glassine envelope from his compact pocket-kit and calmly poured into it the dusty contents of the ashtray. The envelope he handed to Velie.

"You had better keep this with whatever mementoes of the case will be filed at Headquarters," he said in a sprightly tone. "I think it will prove of interest in the final summation. . . . Now, Miss Underhill, if you will please spare us just another slice of your precious time. . . ."

21

KEYS AGAIN

Ellery looked quickly about the garish room and strode over to a large door on the side wall. He opened it and uttered a low exclamation of satisfaction. It was a clothes-closet, packed with feminine garments—gowns, coats, shoes, hats in profusion.

He turned once more to Hortense Underhill, who was

regarding him with peculiar disquiet. Her lips compressed as she saw his hand absently ruffle through the mass of gowns hanging from the racks.

"Miss Underhill, I believe you said that Miss Carmody was at the apartment some months ago, and hasn't been there since?"

She nodded stiffly.

"Do you recall what she wore when she was there last?"

"Really, Mr. Queen," she said in frigid tones, "I haven't such a memory as you evidently give me credit for. How *could* I remember that?"

Ellery grinned. "Very well. Where is Miss Carmody's apartment key?"

"Oh!" The housekeeper was genuinely startled. "That's a funny thing, now, Mr. Queen—I mean your asking that. Because only yesterday morning Bernice told me that she thought she'd lost her key and asked me to get one of the others' keys and duplicate it for her."

"Lost, eh?" Ellery seemed disappointed. "Are you certain, Miss Underhill?"

"I've just told you."

"Well, there's no harm in looking," said Ellery cheerfully. "Here, Velie, lend a hand with these duds. You don't mind, dad?" And in a moment he and the sergeant had attacked the closet with a furious determination, to the accompaniment of the Inspector's chuckle and Hortense Underhill's outraged gasp.

"You see . . ." said Ellery from clenched teeth, as he swiftly passed his hands through coats and gowns, "people don't generally lose things. They merely think they do. . . . In this case, Miss Carmody perhaps searched for it in a few obvious places and gave it up as hopeless. . . . She probably didn't look in the right garments. . . . Ah, there, Velie! Splendid!"

The tall sergeant held up a heavy fur coat. In his left hand gleamed a gold-disked key.

"In an inside pocket, Mr. Queen. The fur coat would make it heavy weather when Miss Carmody last used the key."

"Fair and subtle enough," said Ellery, taking the key. It was an exact duplicate of Weaver's key, which he now took from his pocket and compared with the latest discovery—a twin except for the initials B.C. engraved on the disk.

"Why do you want all the keys, El?" demanded the Inspector. "I can't see any good reason for it."

"You have enormous powers of perspicacity," said Ellery gravely. "Now how did you know I wanted *all* the keys? But you're perfectly right—I do, and I shall take up a collection very shortly. The reason is surely as plain as the nose on your face, as Crouther would say. . . . Don't want anybody getting into that apartment for a while, very simply."

He deposited both keys in his pocket and turned to the unpleasant housekeeper.

"Did you carry out Miss Carmody's orders about duplicating this 'lost' key?" he asked curtly.

The housekeeper sniffed. "I did not," she said. "Because now that I think of it, I don't really know whether or not Bernice was jesting with me when she said she had lost the key. And something happened yesterday afternoon that made me undecided about it, and I thought I'd wait until I saw Bernice again to ask her."

"And what was that, Miss Underhill?" inquired the Inspector, with a slow gentleness.

"Something queer, to tell the truth," she replied thoughtfully. Her eyes flashed suddenly, and her expression became remarkably more human. "I *do* want to help," she said softly. "And I am beginning to think more and more that what happened *will* help. . . ."

"You have us simply petrified with excitement, Miss Underhill," murmured Ellery, without changing expression. "Please proceed."

"Yesterday afternoon, at about four o'clock—no, I think it must have been closer to half-past three—I received a telephone call from Bernice. That was after she had left the house so mysteriously—you know."

The three men stiffened into strained attention. Velie muttered an indistinguishable curse beneath his breath, but quieted under a flashing glance from the Inspector. Ellery leaned forward.

"Yes, Miss Underhill?" he urged.

"It was most puzzling," continued the housekeeper. "Bernice had spoken to me casually about losing the key just before lunch. Yet when she called in the afternoon, the first thing she said was that she wanted her key to the apartment, and would send around for it by messenger at once!"

"Is it possible," muttered the Inspector, "that she thought you had already had a duplicate key made for her?"

"No, Inspector," said the housekeeper incisively. "It didn't sound as if she thought that at all. In fact, it seemed as if she'd utterly forgotten about having lost the key. So much so that I immediately reminded her that she'd told me about losing the key, in the morning, and having another made for her. She seemed quite distressed and said, 'Oh, yes, Hortense! Isn't it stupid of me to forget that way,' and began to say something else, when she stopped suddenly and then said, 'Don't bother, Hortense, after all, it isn't particularly important. I thought I might want to drop in at the apartment this evening.' I reminded her that she could get the use of the master-key at the night-watchman's desk if she wanted to go to the apartment so

badly. But she didn't seem interested and hung up immediately."

There was a little silence. Then Ellery looked up with a great light of interest in his eyes.

"Can you remember, Miss Underhill," he asked, "just what it was that Miss Carmody began to say in the middle of the conversation, and then appeared to reconsider?"

"It's hard to be exact about it, Mr. Queen," replied the housekeeper. "But somehow I got the impression that Bernice was going to ask me to get one of the other keys to the apartment for her. Perhaps I'm wrong."

"Perhaps you are," said Ellery whimsically, "but I'd not give even the most preposterous of odds that you aren't. . . ."

"You know," added Hortense Underhill, as an after-thought, "I also got the impression, when she began to say that and stopped, that—"

"*That somebody was talking to her, Miss Underhill?*" asked Ellery.

"Exactly, Mr. Queen."

The Inspector turned a startled face toward his son. Velie moved his huge bulk lightly forward and whispered in the Inspector's ear. The old man grinned.

"Keen, keen, Thomas," he chuckled. "That's just what I was thinking, too. . . ."

Ellery flicked his finger warningly.

"Miss Underhill, I can't expect you to exhibit miracles of acuteness," he said in a serious, admiring tone. "But I should like to ask—if you're entirely certain that it was Miss Carmody talking to you over the wire?"

"That's it!" cried the Inspector. Velie smiled grimly.

The housekeeper regarded the three men with strangely limpid eyes. Something electric shot through all four.

"I don't—believe—it—was," she whispered. . . .

After a while they left the missing girl's bedroom and

entered an adjoining room. It was severer in tone and immaculately clean.

"This is Mrs. French's room," said the housekeeper in a low voice. Her acid nature seemed sweetened by a sudden realization of complex tragedy. Her eyes followed Ellery with grave respect.

"Is everything in perfect order, Miss Underhill?" asked the Inspector.

"Yes, sir."

Ellery walked over to a wardrobe and scanned its neat racks thoughtfully.

"Miss Underhill, will you please look through this rack and tell us if any of Miss Marion French's clothes are here?"

The housekeeper went through the racks while the three men looked on. She proceeded carefully, then shook her head in an unhesitating negative.

"Then Mrs. French was not in the habit of wearing Miss French's things?"

"Oh, no, sir!"

Ellery smiled with satisfaction and at once wrote a line of hieroglyphics in his makeshift notebook.

22

BOOKS AGAIN

The three men stood uncomfortably in old Cyrus French's bedroom. The nurse fluttered about in the hall, a solid door separating her from her charge. Marion and Weaver had been ordered downstairs to the drawing-room. French's physician, Dr. Stuart, a large impressive man, with a professional irascibility glared at the Queens from his post at French's bedside.

"Five minutes—no longer," he snapped. "Mr. French is hardly in a conversational condition!"

The Inspector clucked placatingly, and stared at the sick man. French lay lumpily in his great bed, nervous eyes darting from one to another of his inquisitors. One flabby white hand plucked at the silk coverlet. His face was entirely drained of color, pasty, shockingly unwholesome in appearance. His grey hair straggled over a furrowed forehead.

The Inspector stepped nearer to the bed. He bent forward and said in a low voice, "This is Inspector Queen of the police, Mr. French. Can you hear me? Do you think you are strong enough to answer a few perfunctory questions about Mrs. French's—accident?"

The quicksilver eyes ceased rolling and concentrated on the gentle grey face of the Inspector. They blinked suddenly with intelligence.

"Yes . . . yes . . ." French whispered, moistening his thin pale lips with a bright tongue. "Anything . . . to clear up this . . . ghastly business. . . ."

"Thank you, Mr. French." The Inspector leaned closer. "Is there any explanation in your mind that might account for the death of Mrs. French?"

The liquid eyes blinked, closed. When they opened, there was an expression of utter bewilderment within their reddish depths.

"No . . . none," French breathed painfully. "None . . . whatsoever. . . . She—she had . . . so many friends . . . no enemies. . . . I—it is . . . unbelievable that any one . . . should be so . . . fiendish as to . . . murder her."

"I see." The Inspector tugged at his mustache with nimble fingers. "Then you know of no one who might have had a *motive* for killing her, Mr. French?"

"No. . . ." The hoarse feeble voice gathered strength suddenly. "The shame—the notoriety. . . . It will be the death of me. . . . With all my . . . unsparing efforts to

put an end to vice . . . that this should happen to me! . . . Hideous, hideous!"

His voice grew more and more violent. The Inspector motioned in alarm to Dr. Stuart, who leaned quickly over the sick man and felt his pulse. Then, in an extraordinarily gentle voice, the physician soothed his patient until the throaty rumblings faded off and the hand on the coverlet unflexed and lay still.

"Have you much more?" asked the doctor in a gruff undertone. "You must be quick, Inspector!"

"Mr. French," said Queen quietly, "is your personal key to the store apartment always in your possession?"

The eyes rolled sleepily. "Eh? Key? Yes . . . yes, always."

"It has certainly not left your person in the past fortnight or so?"

"No . . . positively not. . . ."

"Where is it, Mr. French?" continued the Inspector in an urgent soft voice. "Surely you will not mind letting us have it for a few days, will you, sir? In the interests of justice, of course. . . . Where? Oh, yes! Dr. Stuart, Mr. French asks that you get the key from the key-ring in his trousers hip-pocket. In the wardrobe, sir, the wardrobe!"

In silence the burly physician went to a wardrobe, rummaged about in the first pair of trousers that met his eye, and returned in a moment with a leather key-case. The Inspector examined the gold-disked key marked *C.F.*, unhooked it, and returned the case to the doctor, who promptly replaced it in the trousers. French lay quietly, eyes veiled by puffy lids.

The Inspector handed Cyrus French's key to Ellery, who deposited it with the other keys in his pocket. Then Ellery stepped forward and leaned over the sick man.

"Easy, Mr. French," he murmured in a soothing tone.

"We have just two or three more questions, and then you will be left to your much-needed privacy. . . . Mr. French, do you recall what books are on your desk in the library of your apartment?"

The old man's eyes flew open. Dr. Stuart growled angrily beneath his breath something about "arrant nonsense . . . silly sleuthing." Ellery's body remained in its deferential attitude, his head close to French's slack mouth.

"Books?"

"Yes, Mr. French. The books on your apartment desk. Do you recall their titles?" he urged gently.

"Books." French screwed his mouth up in a desperate effort to concentrate. "Yes, yes. . . . Of course. My favorites . . . Jack London's *Adventure* . . . *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*, by Doyle . . . McCutcheon's *Graustark* . . . *Cardigan*, by Robert W. Chambers, and . . . let me think . . . there was one other . . . yes! *Soldiers of Fortune*, by Richard Harding Davis. . . . That's it—Davis. . . . Knew Davis. . . . Wild, but a . . . a great fellow. . . ."

Ellery and the Inspector exchanged glances. The Inspector's face grew crimson with suppressed emotion. He muttered, "What the deuce!"

"You're certain, Mr. French?" persisted Ellery, leaning over the bed once more.

"Yes . . . yes. My books . . . I should know . . ." whispered the old man, annoyance sounding weakly in his voice.

"Of course! We were merely making sure. . . . Now, sir, have you ever been interested in such subjects as, let us say, paleontology—philately—medieval commerce—folk lore—elementary music?"

The tired eyes widened with puzzled amazement. The head wagged twice from side to side.

"No . . . I can't say that I am. . . . My serious read-

ing is restricted to works on sociology . . . my work for the Anti-Vice Society . . . you know my position. . . ."

"You are positive that your five books by Davis, Chambers, Doyle and the others are on your apartment desk now, Mr. French?"

"I—suppose so," mumbled French. "Been there . . . for ages. . . . Ought to be. . . . Never noticed anything wrong. . . ."

"Very well. That is quite excellent, sir. Thank you." Ellery glanced swiftly at Dr. Stuart, who was exhibiting marked signs of impatience. "One question, Mr. French, and we shall leave you. Has Mr. Lavery been in your apartment recently?"

"Lavery? Yes, of course. Every day. My guest."

"Then that will be all." Ellery stepped back and made a hasty note on the fly-leaf of his now overscribbled little volume. French's eyes closed, and he shifted his body slightly, with an unmistakable relaxation that signified complete fatigue.

"Please leave quietly," grunted Dr. Stuart. "You've retarded his recovery sufficiently for one day."

He turned his back truculently upon them.

The three men tiptoed from the room.

But on the staircase leading to the main foyer, the Inspector muttered, "Where in time do those books come in?"

"Ask me not in mournful numbers," said Ellery ruefully.

"I wish I knew."

Thenceforth they descended in silence.

23

CONFIRMATION

They found Marion and Weaver sitting glumly in the drawing-room, hands clasped, and suspiciously silent. The Inspector coughed, Ellery thoughtfully scrubbed away at

his pince-nez, Velie screwed up his eyes and blinked at a Renoir on the wall.

The boy and the girl sprang to their feet.

"How—how is daddy?" asked Marion hurriedly, one slim hand to a crimson-dappled cheek.

"Resting quietly now, Miss French," replied the Inspector in some embarrassment. "Ah—a question or two, young lady, and then we will be on our way. . . . Ellery!"

Ellery came directly to the point.

"Your key to your father's apartment, Miss French—" he demanded—"is it always in your possession?"

"Why, certainly, Mr. Queen. You don't think—"

"A categorical question, Miss French," said Ellery blandly. "Your key has not left your possession in, let us say, four weeks?"

"Certainly not, Mr. Queen. It's my own, and every one else who might have occasion to go into the apartment has a key of his or her own, as well."

"Lucidly said. May I borrow yours temporarily?"

Marion half-turned toward Weaver with hesitation written in her eyes. Weaver pressed her arm reassuringly.

"Do whatever Ellery asks, Marion," he said.

Without a word Marion rang for a maid, and in a few moments turned over to Ellery another key whose only distinguishing characteristic from the keys already on his person was the neatly engraved *M.F.* on the bright disc. Ellery stowed it away with the others and murmured his thanks, retreating a step.

The Inspector promptly stepped forward.

"I must ask you what may prove an awkward question, Miss French," he said.

"I—we seem to be completely in your hands, Inspector Queen," said the girl, smiling faintly.

The Inspector stroked his mustache. "Just what has been the relationship between yourself, let us say, and your

stepmother and stepsister? Amicable? Strained? Openly antagonistic?"

Marion did not answer at once. Weaver shuffled his feet and turned away. Then the girl's magnificent eyes met the old man's honestly.

"I think 'strained' expresses it exactly," she said in her clear sweet voice. "There has never been much love lost on any side of the triangle. Winifred has always preferred Bernice above me—which is of course natural—and as for Bernice, we didn't agree from the beginning. And as time went on, and—and things began to happen, the rift simply widened. . . ."

"'Things?'" prompted the Inspector suggestively.

Marion bit her lip, flushed. "Well—just little things, you know," she said evasively. She hurried on. "All of us tried very hard to conceal our dislike for each other—for dad's sake. I'm afraid we weren't always successful. Dad is keener than people think."

"I see." The Inspector tchk-ed with concern. He straightened with a peculiarly swift movement of his body. "Miss French, do you know anything that might give us a hint to the murderer of your stepmother?"

Weaver gasped, whitened. He seemed about to voice a bitter protest. But Ellery laid a restraining hand on his arm. The girl grew still, but she did not flinch. She passed her fingers wearily across her forehead.

"I—no." It was a bare whisper.

The Inspector made a deprecating little gesture.

"Oh, please don't ask me anything more about—about *her*," she cried suddenly in an agonized voice. "I can't go on this way, talking about her, trying to tell the truth, because . . ." she spoke more quietly, " . . . because it would be in the poorest taste to calumniate that poor—dead—thing." She shuddered. Weaver boldly put his

arm about her shoulders. She turned to him with a little sigh of relief and buried her face against his breast.

"Miss French." Ellery's tone was gentleness itself. "You can help us on one point. . . . Your stepsister—what brand of cigaret does she smoke?"

Marion's astonishment at the seemingly irrelevant question brought her head up with a start.

"Why—*La Duchesse*."

"Exactly. And she smoked *La Duchesse* exclusively?"

"Yes. At least, for as long as I know her."

"Has she"—Ellery was casual—"has she any peculiarity in her method of smoking, Miss French? Any perhaps slightly unusual habit?"

The pretty brows drew closer together in a little frown. "If you mean by habit"—she hesitated—"a distinct nervousness—yes."

"Does this nervousness manifest itself in a noticeable way?"

"She smokes incessantly, Mr. Queen. And she never takes more than five or six puffs at a cigaret. She doesn't seem by nature able to smoke calmly. A few puffs, and she grinds out the long stump of tobacco still remaining almost with—viciousness. The cigarets she leaves are always bent and twisted out of shape."

"Thank you so much." Ellery's firm lips lifted in a smile of satisfaction.

"Miss French—" the Inspector took up the attack—"you left this house last night after dinner. You did not return until midnight. *Where were you during those four hours?*"

Silence. A frightened silence so suddenly fraught with hidden complications of emotion that it seemed almost of physical substance. It was a tableau created for a single moment's duration: the slight Inspector, alert, controlled, leaning forward; the straight body of Ellery, muscles com-

pletely inanimate; the vague bulk of Velie, drawn and powerful; a petrified agony on Weaver's mobile features—and the utter misery of Marion French's slender, stricken figure.

It passed in the drawing of a breath. Marion sighed, and the four men relaxed stealthily.

"I was . . . walking in . . . the Park," she said.

"Oh!" The Inspector smiled, bowed, smoothed his mustache. "Then there is nothing more to be said, Miss French. Good afternoon."

It was simply said, and the Inspector, Ellery and Velie passed from the room, into the reception hall, out of the house without another word spoken.

But it left Marion and Weaver in a dejection and apprehension so profound that they stood in their places, exactly as they had been, eyes turned away from each other, long after the outer door had snicked cleanly shut.

24

THE QUEENS TAKE STOCK

Dusk was descending on the city when Velie took leave of the Queens outside the French mansion to manipulate the official machinery already operating on the shadowy trail of the vanished Bernice Carmody.

After Velie had gone, the Inspector looked at the quiet River, looked at the darkening sky, looked at his son, who was energetically polishing his pince-nez and staring down at the pavement.

The Inspector sighed. "The air will do both of us a lot of good," he said tiredly. "I need something to clear my addled brain, anyway. . . . Ellery, let's walk home."

Ellery nodded, and side by side they sauntered down the Drive toward the corner. At the corner they turned east

and settled down to a slow, thoughtful pace. They walked another block before the silence was broken.

"This is really the first chance," remarked Ellery at last, grasping his father's arm encouragingly at the elbow, "that I've had to mull over the multitude of factors that have arisen so far. Significant factors. Telling factors, dad! There are so many they give me *mal à la tête*."

"Really?" The Inspector was depressed, morose. His shoulders sagged.

Ellery regarded him keenly. He tightened his grip on the old man's arm. "Come, dad! Buck up. I know you're at sea, but it's because of the trouble and worry you've had on your mind recently. My brain has been more than usually free from occupation lately. It's been clear enough to grasp the amazing fundamentals this case has spewed up today. Let me think aloud."

"Go ahead, son."

"One of the two most valuable clues this affair has given us is the fact that the corpse was found in the Fifth Avenue exhibition window."

The Inspector snorted. "I suppose you'll tell me now that you already know who did the job."

"Yes."

The Inspector was so taken aback that he stopped in his tracks and stared at Ellery with an expression of complete dismay and unbelief.

"Ellery! You're joking. How *could* you?" he finally managed to splutter.

Ellery smiled gravely. "Don't misunderstand me. I say I know who murdered Mrs. French. I should qualify that by saying that certain indications point with incredible consistency at one individual. I have no proof. I don't grasp one-tenth of the implications. I am entirely ignorant of the motive, the undoubtedly sordid story behind the

crime. . . . Consequently, I shall not tell you whom I have in mind."

"You wouldn't," growled the Inspector, as they walked on.

"Now, dad!" Ellery laughed a little. He tightened his hold on the small package of books from French's library table, which he had carried stubbornly from the moment they had left the department store. "I have a good reason. In the first place, it's quite conceivable that I'm being misled by a series of coincidences. In that case, I should merely be making an ass of myself if I accused some one and then had to eat crow. . . . When I have *proof*—you'll know, dad, the very first one. . . . There are so many unexplained, seemingly inexplicable things. These books, for example. . . . Well!"

He said no more for a few moments as they strode through the streets.

"I began," he said at last, "with the suspicious fact that Mrs. French's body was found in the exhibition-window. And it *was* suspicious, to say the least. For all the reasons that we went over before—the lack of blood, the missing key, the lipstick and the half-painted lips, the lack of illumination, the general preposterousness of the window as the scene of the crime.

"It was quite plain that Mrs. French had not been murdered in that window. Where had she been murdered, then? The watchman's report that she had signified the apartment as her destination; the missing apartment key *which she had* when O'Flaherty saw her go toward the elevator—these suggested that the apartment should be examined at once. Which I immediately proceeded to do."

"Go on—I know all that," said Queen grumpily.

"Patience, Diogenes!" chuckled Ellery. "The apartment told the story quite graphically. Mrs. French's presence

seemed indubitable. The cards, the book-ends and the story they told. . . .”

“I don’t know what story they told,” grunted the Inspector. “You mean that powder?”

“Not in this instance. Very well, let’s forget the book-ends for the moment and go to—the lipstick which I found on the bedroom dressing-table. That belonged to Mrs. French. Its color matched the color on her half-painted lips. Women don’t stop fixing their lips unless something of a tremendously serious nature intervenes. The murder? Possibly. Certainly the events leading to the murder. . . . So, for this reason and that, all of which you will know in greater detail to-morrow, I hope, I came to the conclusion that Mrs. French had been murdered in that apartment.”

“I shan’t argue with you, because it’s probably true, although your reasons are ludicrous right now. But go ahead—get down to more concrete things,” said the Inspector.

“You must grant me some premises,” laughed Ellery. “I’ll prove that apartment business, never fear. At this time, grant me that the apartment is the scene of the crime.”

“It’s granted—for the time.”

“Very well. If the apartment was the scene of the crime, and the window was not, then very simply the body was removed from the apartment to the window and crammed into that wall-bed.”

“In that case, yes.”

“But why? I asked myself. *Why* was the body removed to the window? Why wasn’t it left in the apartment?”

“To make it appear that the apartment wasn’t the scene of the murder? But that doesn’t make sense, because—”

“Yes, because no pains were taken to remove traces of

Mrs. French's presence, like the game of banque, the lipstick—although I'm inclined to think that leaving the lipstick was an oversight. It is evident, then, that the reason the body was removed was *not* to make it appear that the apartment was not the scene of the crime, *but to delay the discovery of the body.*"

"I see what you mean," muttered the Inspector.

"The time-element, of course," said Ellery. "The murderer must have known that at 12 o'clock sharp, every day, that window was exhibited, *and that the window was locked and unused before 12 o'clock.* I was looking for a reason to explain the removal of the body. The fact that it would not be discovered until after the noon hour gave the answer in a flash. For some reason the murderer wanted to delay the discovery of the crime."

"I can't see why. . . ."

"Not definitely, of course, but we can make a generalization that will serve the immediate purpose. If the murderer arranged it so that the body would not be found before noon, it meant that he had something to do during the morning which the discovery of the body *would have prevented him from doing.* Is that clear?"

"It follows," conceded the Inspector.

"*Allons—continuer!*" said Ellery. "At first glance, that business about having to do something which the discovery of the crime would make impossible of accomplishment, is something of a poser. However, we know certain facts. For example, no matter how the murderer entered the store, *he must have stayed all night.* There were two ways of getting in unnoticed but no way of getting out unnoticed after the murder. He could have remained hidden somewhere in the store until after closing-hours, and then stolen up to the apartment; or he could have slipped through that open freight-door on 39th Street. He certainly couldn't get out through the Employees' Entrance,

because O'Flaherty was there all night, in a perfect position to see somebody leave that way. And O'Flaherty saw no one. He couldn't have got out through the freight-door, because that door was locked for the night at eleven-thirty, and Mrs. French didn't arrive until eleven-forty-five. If he had slipped out via the freight-door, he couldn't have committed the murder. Obviously! The freight-door was closed to him at least a half-hour before the woman was killed at all. So—he must have had to remain in the store all night.

"Now, that being the case, he could not escape until at least nine o'clock the next morning, when the doors were opened to the public and any one could walk out as if he were an early customer."

"Well then, why all that rigmarole about stowing the body in the window in order to prevent its discovery before noon? What for?" demanded the Inspector. "If he could get out at nine o'clock and he had something to do, why couldn't he have done it then? In that case he wouldn't care when the body was found, because he could do what was necessary immediately after nine."

"Precisely." Ellery's voice sharpened with a certain zest. "*If he were free to walk out at nine and stay out*, he would have no reason for delaying the discovery of the body."

"But, Ellery," objected the Inspector, "he *did* delay the discovery of the body! Unless—" A light dawned on his face.

"That's it exactly," Ellery said soberly. "If our murderer was in some way connected with the store, his absence would be noted or at least would be in danger of notice after a murder was discovered. By secreting the body in a place where he knew it would not be found until noon, he had all morning to watch for an opportunity to slip away and do what he had to do. . . .

"Of course, there's something else. It's an open ques-

tion whether the murderer planned in advance to secrete the body in the window after killing Mrs. French in the apartment. I rather think the switch of locale was not planned on much before the crime. For this reason. Ordinarily the apartment is not entered until about ten o'clock in the morning. Weaver has his own office, and French doesn't get down until that hour. So that the murderer must have figured, in his original plan, on committing the crime in the apartment and leaving the body there. He would have ample time to get out of the building after nine and return before ten, let us say. So long as the body was found *after* he attended to his nefarious morning business, he was safe.

"But when he entered that apartment, or perhaps after he committed the crime, he saw something which made it absolutely essential for him to remove the body to the window." Ellery paused. "On the desk was a blue official memorandum. It was there all afternoon on Monday, and Weaver swears he left it there on the desk when he quit Monday evening. And it was in exactly the same position on Tuesday morning. So it was there for the murderer to see. And it said that Weaver would be there at nine o'clock! It was an innocent little memo calling a board meeting, but it must have put the murderer into something of a panic. If somebody was coming to the apartment at nine, he wouldn't have a chance to do what evidently was of desperate necessity, although we still don't know what it is. Therefore the removal of the body to the window and the rest of it. Follow?"

"Seems holeproof," grunted the Inspector, but there was a light of absorbing interest in his eye.

"There's one vital thing to be done almost immediately," added Ellery thoughtfully. "Unquestionably whoever committed the crime did not hide in the store yesterday afternoon and wait for closing hour. I'll tell you why.

The complete time-sheet is a check-up on everybody connected with this investigation. The time-sheet gives the checking-out time of everybody. All the people we're interested in are reported as having left the building at five-thirty or before, with the exception of Weaver and this man Springer, the head of the book department. And since they were definitely seen leaving, they couldn't obviously have *stayed* for the crime. You remember the names? Although people like Zorn, Marchbanks, Lavery and the rest do not check out, their name and time are noted when they leave the building, as was the case yesterday. Since everybody did leave, then the murderer must have got into the building by the only way left—the freight-door on 39th Street. It would be the more logical thing for the murderer to do anyway, because he could establish an alibi for the evening, and still have time to get into the store through that freight-entrance between eleven and eleven-thirty."

"We'll have to double-check everybody's movements last night," said the Inspector dolefully. "More work."

"And probably unproductive. But I agree that it's necessary. We should do that as soon as possible."

"Now." Ellery's lips twisted into a rueful smile. "There are so many ramifications to this case," he said apologetically, interrupting his line of thought. "For example—why did Winifred come to the store at all? There's a question for you! And was she lying when she told O'Flaherty that she was going to the apartment upstairs? Of course, the watchman did see her take the elevator, and it is a fair assumption that she went to the sixth floor rooms, especially since we have definite evidence of her presence there. Besides, where else could she go? The window? Preposterous! No, I think we may assume that she went directly to the private apartment."

"Perhaps Marion French's scarf was already in the win-

dow and for some obscure reason Mrs. French wished to retrieve it," suggested the Inspector, grinning wryly.

"Yes, you *don't* think," retorted Ellery. "That business of Marion's scarf has a perfectly simple explanation, I'm positive, whatever else may be mysterious about the girl. . . . But here's a point. Did Winifred French have an appointment with a particular person, in the store, in the apartment? Granted the whole affair is cloaked in mystery—a clandestine meeting in a deserted department store and all that—yet the hypothesis that the murdered woman came for a definite purpose to meet a definite person seems too inevitable to discard. In that case, then, did she know about the strange manner in which her fellow-conspirator, and as it turned out her murderer, entered the store? Or did she expect him to walk in as she did, through the regular night-entrance? Evidently not, because she made no mention of another person to O'Flaherty, which she might have done had she nothing to conceal, but gave him the distinct impression that she had dropped in for something. Then she *was* involved in some shady business, *did* know that her companion would take mysterious precautions against discovery—openly and submissively.

"Was that companion Bernice or Marion? We have reason to believe, from the mere look of things, that it might have been Bernice. The banque game, Bernice's cigarets, Bernice's hat and shoes—very significant and alarming, those last two items. On the other hand, let us examine some sidelights on the question of Bernice.

"We are fairly agreed that the murderer of Mrs. French took away Mrs. French's apartment key. This might point to Bernice on first thought, because we know she did not have her own key that afternoon—in fact, she couldn't have had her own key, since we actually found it in her closet at home to-day. Yes, it appears that if Bernice

had been in that store last night, she would have taken her mother's key away. *But was she in the store?*

"The time has come, I do believe," said Ellery quizzically, "to lay that particular ghost. Bernice was *not* in the French department store last night. Perhaps I had better say at this point that Bernice is not a matricide. In the first place, despite the presence of the game of banque, which is known by many people to be a passion of both women, the presence of the cigarets betrays the frame-up. Bernice, who is a drug addict, has been indicated beyond a doubt as *always* smoking only one-quarter of the length of her *La Duchesse* cigarets, and crushing out the long stub. Yet the stubs we found were *without exception* smoked carefully down almost to the tip. This is so unnatural as to be conclusive. One or two cigarets might conceivably be found so consumed; but to find a dozen! It's no go, dad. Bernice did not smoke those cigarets we found on the card-table. And, of course, if she did not, then some one else prepared them with the obvious intention of throwing suspicion on the missing girl. Then there's the matter of the 'phone call to Hortense Underhill, presumably from Bernice. Fishy, dad—exceedingly piscine! No, Bernice didn't forget about her key so foolishly. *Somebody wanted her key badly enough to risk a call and a messenger.*"

"The shoes—the hat," murmured the Inspector suddenly, looking up at Ellery in a startled way.

"Exactly," said Ellery somberly, "very significant and alarming, as I said before. If Bernice was framed, and we find on the scene of the crime the shoes and hat she wore the day of the murder—then it simply means that Bernice has met with violence herself! She must be a victim, dad. Whether she is already dead or not I don't know. It depends on the masked story behind the crime. But certainly this deduction links the disappearance of Bernice

and the murder of her mother very closely. Now why should the girl be done away with also? Perhaps, dad, if she were left at large, she might be a dangerous source of information—dangerous as far as the criminal is concerned.”

“Ellery!” exclaimed the Inspector. He was trembling with excitement. “Mrs. French’s murder—Bernice’s kidnapping—and *she was a drug fiend*. . . .”

“I’m not particularly surprised, dad,” said Ellery warmly. “You have always been quick on the scent. . . . Yes, it looks that way to me, too. Remember that Bernice walked out of her stepfather’s house not only willingly, but eagerly. Is it too much to suppose that she was going—to replenish a waning supply of drugs?”

“If that is so, and it seems a good sound possibility, then this whole case is shrouded and complicated by the manipulations—of drug distributors. I’m very much afraid we’ve fallen into just such a prosaic business as that.”

“Prosaic your left eyebrow!” cried Inspector Queen. “Ellery, it gets clearer and clearer. And with all this rumpus about the increase in drug distribution—if we should uncover the ring that’s been operating so hugely—if we should actually *nab* the ringleaders—Ellery, it will be a remarkable achievement! How I’d like to see Fiorelli’s face when I tell him what’s behind this!”

“Well, don’t be oversanguine, dad,” said Ellery pessimistically. “It may be a *tour de force*. At any rate it’s sheer conjecture at this stage of the game, and we shouldn’t be too uplifted by hope.

“We have another angle that helps us localize the geography of the crime even more precisely.”

“The book-ends?” Inspector Queen’s voice was uncertain.

“Of course. This too is based on pure reasoning, but I’ll wager any one anything that in the end we find it’s true.

Conclusions that fit a series of circumstances so snugly have an overwhelmingly high percentage of probability in their favor. . . .

"Westley Weaver avers positively that the onyx book-ends have neither been repaired nor removed from the apartment library since they were presented to French by John Gray. In examining the book-ends we find a noticeable difference in the color of the green felt, or baize, pasted on the bases, the under surfaces. Weaver offers the suggestion that something is wrong. Why? Because this is the first time he has noticed the differing shades of green. He has seen those book-ends for months. He is certain that when the book-ends were new the felts were alike in color, that they must have been alike all along.

"As a matter of fact, while there is no evidential method whereby we may tell when exactly that lighter felt appeared, there is one corroboration." Ellery stared thoughtfully at the pavement. "The book-end with the lighter felt was newly glued. That I would take my oath on. The glue, while powerful in action and already quite hard, retained a viscosity and suspicious stickiness that told the story at once. And the powder grains stuck in the glue-line—no, the evidence is there. The book-ends were handled last night by the criminal. We might suspect Mrs. French, perhaps, if not for the fact that the fingerprint powder was used. That's the work of your 'supercriminal,' dad, not of an elderly society lady." He smiled.

"Let's try to link book-ends and crime more closely." He squinted ahead in a little tempest of silence. The old man trudged by his side, eyes on the changing street vista. "We enter the scene of the crime. We find many things of a peculiar nature there. The cards, the lipsticks, the cigarets, the shoes, the hat, the book-ends—all out of tune with normality. We have linked every element except the book-ends directly with the crime. Why, in the

face of the possibilities—why not the book-ends too? I can furnish excellent hypotheses commensurate with known facts. The fingerprint powder grains, for one thing. Accessories of crime. And a crime was committed. We find the grains stuck in a newly glued felt, which is also suspiciously different in shade from its fellow. Certainly it is against all reason to say that the felts might have been differently colored from the beginning. Not with such an expensive and unique pair of book-ends. And the difference was never noticed before. . . . No, the human probabilities all point to the conclusion that last night some one removed the original felt from the first book-end, pasted on a new piece of felt, sprinkled fingerprint powder to bring out any prints that might be on the book-end, removed the fingerprints, and inadvertently left some minute grains in the fresh glue-line of the piece.”

“You’ve proved it to my satisfaction,” said the Inspector. “Go on.”

“*Alors!* I examine the book-ends. They are of solid onyx. Furthermore, the only change in their composition is the removal of the original felt from one of them. I conclude therefore that the book-end was *not* repaired in order to hide something inside or because something was extracted from its interior. There is no interior. Everything is on the surface.

“With this in mind, I ask myself: What other reason could have caused the repair of the onyx piece, if it was not to hide traces of a secretion or a removal? Well, there’s the crime itself. Can we tie the crime and the fixing of the book-ends into one knot?

“Yes, we can! Why should a felt be removed and another substituted? *Because something happened to that felt which, if the felt were left as it was, would have betrayed traces of a crime.* Remember that the murderer’s most pressing need was to keep knowledge of the murder

from every one until he had delivered the all-important message during the morning. And he knew that that library would be tenanted at nine o'clock in the morning, that if anything were wrong with the book-end it would be noticed in all probability."

"Blood!" exclaimed the Inspector.

"You've hit on it," replied Ellery. "It could scarcely be anything else but bloodstains. It would have to be something of a directly suspicious nature, or the murderer would not have taken all the trouble he did. The cards, the other things—these in themselves would never suggest a murder before the body was found or foul play even suspected. But blood! That's the water-mark of violence.

"So I reasoned that in some way blood soaked the felt, and the murderer was compelled to change the felt and dispose of the tell-tale bloody one."

They walked on in silence for a long time. The Inspector was buried in thought. Then Ellery spoke once more.

"You see," he said, "I was progressing with commendable rapidity in the reconstruction of the physical elements of the crime. And, when I had reached the conclusion about the blood-soaked felt, immediately another isolated fact leaped into my mind. . . . You remember Prouty's suspicions in connection with the lack of blood on the corpse? And our instant deduction that the murder must have been committed somewhere else? Here was the missing link."

"Good, good," murmured the Inspector, reaching excitedly for his snuff-box.

"The book-ends," went on Ellery rapidly, "were obviously of no importance in the crime *until* they became blood-soaked. After that, of course, the whole chain of incident was a logical outgrowth—changing the felt,

handling the book-ends, and then applying the powder to efface prints made necessary by the handling. . . .

"Then, I reasoned, the staining of the book-end was an accident. It was standing innocently on the glass-topped desk. How could the blood have got on it? There are two possibilities. The first is that the book-end was used as a weapon. But this is indefensible, because the wounds were the result of revolver-shots, and there are no signs of a *striking* blow with such a bludgeon as the book-end might have made. Then the only remaining possibility is that the blood got on it inadvertently. How might this have occurred?

"Easily. The book-end is on the glass-topped desk. The only way blood could get on the bottom of the book-end, where the blood would show ineffaceably, would be by its *trickling across the glass* and soaking into the material. But you see what this gives us."

"Mrs. French was sitting at the desk when she was shot," announced the old man gloomily. "She was shot below the heart. She fell into the chair and got another in the heart itself. The blood from the first wound gushed out before she fell. The blood from the second wound trickled out as she lay across the table—and soaked into the felt."

"And that," said Ellery, smiling, "is a perfect recitation. Remember that Prouty is sure that the *precordial* type of wound particularly would bleed profusely. That's probably what happened. . . . Now we can further reconstruct the crime. If Mrs. French sat at the desk and was shot in the heart, then her murderer was in front of her and shot across the desk. It must have been at a distance of several feet, because there are no powder marks on the woman's clothes. We can perhaps compute the approximate height of the murderer by determining the angle at which the bullets entered the body. But I have little faith in this, because there is no exact way of judging just how

far the bullets traveled, or in other words how far from Mrs. French the murderer stood when he fired. And an error of inches would throw off all our calculations as to his height, considerably. You might get your firearms expert, Kenneth Knowles, on the job, but I don't think much will come of it."

"Neither do I," sighed the Inspector. "Nevertheless, it's comforting to be able to place the crime so precisely. It all hangs together, Ellery—a nice bit of reasoning. I'll get Knowles to work immediately. Is there anything else, son?"

Ellery said nothing for an appreciable moment. They turned into West 87th Street. Half-way up the block stood the brownstone old house in which they lived. They quickened their steps.

"There's a heap more, dad, that I haven't gone into, because of this and that," Ellery said absently. "The signs were all there, for the world to see. They needed intelligent assembly, however. You're probably the only one on the scene who has the mental potentiality for piecing them together. The others . . . And you're exceptionally dulled by care." He smiled as they reached the brownstone steps of their dwelling.

"Dad," he said, one foot on the lowest step, "on one phase of this investigation I am entirely at sea. And that—" he tapped the package under his arm, "is the five books I plucked from old French's desk. It seems silly to suppose that they can have anything to do with the murder, and yet—I have the queerest feeling that they can explain so much if we worm out their secret."

"You've gone slightly daffy with concentration," growled the Inspector, laboriously ascending the stairs.

"Nevertheless," remarked Ellery, inserting a key into the lock of the big carved old-fashioned door, "this night is dedicated to a sedulous analysis of the books."

THE FOURTH EPISODE

"Oriental police set far smaller store by the criminal alibi than do Occidentals. . . . We know only too well what warped cunning is capable of . . . and prefer to probe emotions and instincts rather than crack down highly glazed stories. This is undoubtedly explained by the difference in psychology of the two racial strains. . . . The Oriental is notoriously more suspicious than the Occidental, dealing with fundamentals rather than superficials. . . . Where the Western world is inclined to shout a lusty BANZAI! in acclamation of its more successful rogues, we cut off their ears, or put them in stocks for milder crimes, or behead them for major ones—but always pointing out by example (with true Japanese subtlety, perhaps?) the overwhelming ignominy of the punishment. . . ."

—From the Preface to the English edition of *A THOUSAND LEAVES*,
By Tamaka Hiero.

ELLERIUS BIBLIOPHILUS

THE hearth of the Queen domicile was housed in one of the West 87th Street's lingering brownstones. That the Queens chose to live among the unvarnished woods of a generation dead and gone was a commentary upon the powerful influence of son upon father. For Ellery, whose collection of well-used books, whose dilettante's knowledge of antiquities, whose love for the best of the past, overwhelmed his natural leaning toward the comforts of the modern age, stood firmly against the Inspector's groaning indictment of "dustiness and mustiness."

You might expect, therefore, that the Queens lived on the top floor of this sprawling old mansion, and that the door was of time-softened oak (on which appeared their only concession to expediency—a placard labeled "The Queens"), and that when you were admitted by gypsy-blooded Djuna, an odor redolent of old leather and masculinity would assail the nostrils.

There was an anteroom hung with a vast tapestry (the gift of the Duke of —— in return for the Inspector's services in a matter preserved in silence). The anteroom was opulently Gothic, and it was Ellery's will again which prevented the Inspector from consigning it, period furniture and all, to the auction rooms.

And there was the living-room and library. Dotted with books, massed with books. Oak-ribbed ceiling—huge natural fireplace with a broad oak mantel and curious old ironwork—the Nuremberg swords crossed martially above—old lamps, brasswork, massive furniture. Chairs,

divans, footstools, leather cushions, ashstands—a veritable fairyland of easy bachelordom.

Off the living-room was the bedroom, a chaste and comfortable rest-place.

The whole was presided over by small, volatile Djuna, the orphan boy adopted by Inspector Queen during his lonely years when Ellery was attending the University. Djuna's world was limited to his beloved patron and their common dwelling-place. Valet, cook, housekeeper and on occasion confidant. . . .

At nine o'clock of the morning of Wednesday, the twenty-fifth of May—the day after the discovery of Mrs. Winifred French's lifeless body in the French establishment—Djuna was setting the table in the living-room for a late breakfast. Ellery was conspicuous by his absence from the room. The Inspector sat grumpily in his favorite arm-chair, staring at Djuna's twinkling brown hands.

The telephone bell rang. Djuna grasped the instrument.

"For you, Dad Queen," he announced pompously. "It's the District Attorney."

The old man plodded across the room to the telephone.

"Hello! Hello, Henry. . . . We-e-ell, a little progress. Something tells me Ellery is on the scent. In fact, he told me so himself. . . . What? . . . Yes, as far as I'm concerned it's a devil's brew. Can't make head or tail of it. . . . Oh, go on with your blarney, Henry! I'm talking straight. . . . The situation is briefly this."

The Inspector spoke for a long time in a voice fluctuating between despair and excitement. District Attorney Henry Sampson listened carefully.

"And that," concluded the Inspector, "is where it stands at this moment. Something tells me Ellery is up to one of his familiar tricks. He was up half the night poring over those infernal books. . . . Yes, certainly, I'll keep you posted. May need you soon at that, Henry. Ellery per-

forms miracles at times, although I'd wager my next year's pay that— Oh, go on back to your work, you ferret!"

He hung up the receiver in time to greet a prodigiously yawning Ellery who fumbled with his necktie and endeavored to keep the folds of his dressing-gown together simultaneously.

"So!" growled the Inspector, plumping into his chair. "What time did you get to bed, young man?"

Ellery finished the delicately dual operation and reached for a chair, digging Djuna surreptitiously in the ribs.

"No scolding now," he said, reaching for a piece of toast. "Have breakfast yet? No? Waiting for the sluggard? Regale yourself with this Olympian coffee—we can talk as we eat."

"What time?" repeated the Inspector inexorably, sitting down at the table.

"To be temporal," said Ellery, his mouth full of coffee, "it was three-twenty A.M."

The old man's eyes softened. "Shouldn't do that," he mumbled, reaching for the percolator. "It'll fag you."

"Essential." Ellery drained his cup. "There are things to do, Sir. . . . Have you heard anything this morning?"

"Plenty that means nothing," said the Inspector. "I've been at that 'phone since seven. . . . Got a preliminary autopsy report from Sam Prouty. Nothing to add to what he said yesterday except that there are absolutely no signs of drug poisoning or addiction. The woman was certainly not a 'dope.' "

"Interesting, and not necessarily uninformative," smiled Ellery. "What else?"

"Knowles, the firearms man, was vague enough to make it unexciting. He claims that he couldn't place the distance the bullets traveled before they entered the body, exactly to the foot. The angles are easily determined, but from his calculations the murderer might be anywhere

from five to six feet in height. Not very illuminating, eh?"

"Hardly. We'll never convict anybody on that kind of evidence. But I can scarcely blame Knowles. These things are rarely absolute. How about the absentees from the store yesterday?"

The Inspector scowled. "Had one of the boys checking up with MacKenzie all yesterday evening. Just had MacKenzie on the wire. Everybody accounted for, not a thing suspicious or unexplained. And as for this Carmody girl, poor Thomas had his strings out all night. Combed the neighborhood. Contacted the Missing Persons Bureau. I tipped him off on the drug business, and the Narcotic Squad's been busy checking up on known dives. Nothing doing. Not a trace of her."

"Just dropped out of existence. . . ." Ellery frowned, poured himself another cup of coffee. "I'll confess the girl has me worried. As I said yesterday, all signs point to her having been done away with. If not done away with, then certainly held very securely in a remote hide-out. If I were the murderer, I think I'd add her to my list of victims. . . . There's just a bare chance that she may be alive, dad. Velie must redouble his efforts."

"Don't worry about Thomas," said the Inspector grimly. "If she's alive, he'll find her in time. If she's dead—Well! He's doing all he can."

The telephone bell rang again. The Inspector answered.

"Yes, this is Inspector Queen talking. . . ." His tone changed magically. It dripped formality. "Good morning, Commissioner. What can I do for you? . . . Well, sir, we're getting along very nicely. We've gathered together a heap of threads, and it's not twenty-four hours since we found the body. . . . Oh, no! Mr. French has been a bit upset about the whole affair. We've gone quite easy on him—nothing to worry about there, sir. . . . Yes,

I know. We're making it as comfortable for him as we can under the circumstances. . . . No, Commissioner. Lavery has an absolutely unimpeachable reputation. A foreigner, of course. . . . What's that? Absolutely no! . . . We have a perfectly natural explanation for that scarf of Miss Marion French's, sir. Well, I'm relieved too, to tell the truth, Commissioner. . . . Quick solution? Commissioner, it will be quicker than that! . . . Yes, sir, I know. . . . Thank you, Commissioner. I'll keep you posted."

"And that," said the Inspector in a deadly voice, as he hung up the receiver carefully and turned a livid face toward Ellery, "is a sample of the blank-dangest, extra-soft-boiled, unmitigated blatherskite of a mud-hen of a police commissioner that this or any city ever had!"

Ellery laughed aloud. "You'll be frothing at the mouth if you don't control yourself. Every time I hear you rave about Welles I'm reminded of that sage Germanic dictum: 'Who fills an office must learn to bear reproach and blame.'"

"On the contrary, I'm getting soft words from Welles," said the Inspector, in a calmer tone. "He's frightened out of his wits about this French affair. French wields a lot of power for a harmless old reformer, and Welles doesn't like the possibilities. Did you hear the absolute nonsense I salvaged him with over the 'phone? Sometimes I think I've lost my self-respect."

But Ellery was suddenly plunged in thought. His eyes had spied the five books from French's desk, which now lay on an end-table nearby. With an indistinct murmur of sympathy, he rose and sauntered over to the table, fingering the books affectionately. The old man's eyes narrowed.

"Out with it!" he said. "You've discovered something in those books!" He hopped out of his chair suspiciously.

"Yes, I think I have," replied Ellery slowly. He picked

up the five books and carried them to the breakfast-table. "Sit down, dad. My work last night wasn't entirely wasted."

They sat down. The Inspector's eyes were bright and curious as he chose one of the books at random and riffled its pages aimlessly. Ellery watched him.

"Suppose, dad," said Ellery, "you take up these five books and go through them. Here's the situation. You have five volumes, the only fact to go on being that they're queer books for a certain person to possess. You're looking for a reason to explain why those five books are where they are. Go to it."

He lit a cigaret thoughtfully and leaned back in his chair, blowing smoke at the paneled ceiling. The Inspector seized on the volumes and attacked them singly. When he had finished with one, he took up the next, and so on until he had examined all five. The wrinkles on his forehead deepened. He looked up at Ellery out of very puzzled eyes.

"Danged if I can see anything remarkable in these books, Ellery. There doesn't seem to be a point of similarity among them."

Ellery smiled, drew his body forward abruptly. He tapped the books with a long forefinger for emphasis. "That's exactly why they *are* remarkable," he said. "There doesn't seem to be a point of similarity. And in fact, except for one little link, they *haven't* any points of similarity."

"You're talking Greek," said the Inspector. "Elucidate."

For answer Ellery rose and disappeared into the bedroom. He reappeared in a moment with a long slip of paper on which were copiously inscribed in a weird series of scrawled characters a body of notes.

"This," he announced, reseating himself at the table, "is

the result of last night's séance with the ghosts of five authors' brain-children. . . . Lend ear, Father Queen.

"The books, by title and author, are as follows—just to make the analysis entirely clear: *New Developments in Philately*, by Hugo Salisbury. *Fourteenth Century Trade and Commerce*, by Stani Wedjowski. *A Child's History of Music*, by Ramon Freyberg. *An Outline of Paleontology*, by John Morrison. And finally, *Nonsense Anthology*, by A. I. Throckmorton.

"Let's analyze these five books.

"Number one. The titles have not the slightest connection with each other. Because of this fact, we can discard any thought that the *subject matter* of the books is relevant to our investigation.

"Number two. The dissimilarity is further heightened by a number of small points. For example, all the covers are of different colors. True, there are two blues, but they are of distinct hues. The sizes are different: three of the books are oversize, and all of these oversizes have differing dimensions: one of the books is a pocket edition; the last book is of average size. The bindings are different: three of them are of cloth, but of different grain; one of them is a de luxe leather binding; one of them is bound in linen. The inner format is different. In two cases the paper is light India in shade; in the other three white is used. Of the white different weights are apparent. The type-style, on examination, although I know little enough about such technical matters, is in each instance different. The number of pages differs also—and their actual enumeration elicits no intelligible message. They mean nothing. . . . Even in price they show dissimilarity. The leather-covered book is listed at ten dollars; two others are five; the fourth is three-fifty, and the pocket edition is a dollar and a half. The publishers are different. The dates of issue and number of editions are different. . . ."

"But Ellery—of course—they're more or less obvious . . ." objected the Inspector. "Where does this lead you?"

"In an analysis," returned Ellery, "nothing is too trivial to be overlooked. They may mean nothing and they may mean a heap. In any case, they are definite facts about these five books. And if they point to nothing else, they certainly indicate that physically the books differ in practically every respect.

"Number three—and this is the first exciting development—the right-hand top corner of the back inside leaf—let me repeat that: the right-hand top corner of the back inside leaf—has the notation in hard pencil of a date!"

"A date?" The Inspector snatched one of the books from the table and turned to the back inside leaf. There, in the upper right-hand corner, was a tiny penciled date. He examined the other four books and they exhibited in exactly the same places similar penciled dates.

"If," continued Ellery calmly, "you arrange these dates arbitrarily in their chronological order this is the result:

4/13/19—

4/21/19—

4/29/19—

5/7 /19—

5/16/19—

"By consulting the calendar I discovered that these dates represent, progressively as I have given them: Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Monday."

"That's interesting," muttered the Inspector. "Why is Sunday omitted?"

"A valuable little point," said Ellery. "In four cases we have consecutive days of the week, one week apart. In one case a day—Sunday—is skipped. That this is an oversight on the part of the dater is not likely; that a book is missing is impossible, because the number of days between

the first four dates is eight, and the fifth is increased only to nine. Plainly, then, Sunday was omitted for the reason that Sunday is generally omitted—it is a non-working day. What the work is I haven't at the moment an answer for. But we may take the irregularity in the case of the Sunday omission as a logical irregularity which you will find in any part of the business world."

"Follows," commented the Inspector.

"Very well. We now come to point number four. And this is of considerable interest. Dad, take up the five books and read the titles in the chronological order of their dates."

The old man obeyed. "*Fourteenth Century Trade and Commerce*, by Stani Wedjowski. The—"

"One moment," interrupted Ellery. "What's the date on the back inside leaf?"

"April thirteenth."

"What day is April thirteenth?"

"Wednesday."

Ellery's face lit up triumphantly. "Well?" he cried. "Don't you see the connection?"

The Inspector looked slightly nettled. "Darned if I do. . . . The second one is *Nonsense Anthology*, by A. I. Throckmorton."

"Date and day?"

"Thursday, April twenty-first. . . . The next is *A Child's History of Music*, by Ramon Freyberg—Friday, April twenty— By jinks, Ellery! Friday, April twenty-ninth!"

"Yes, go on," said Ellery approvingly.

The Inspector concluded rapidly. "*New Developments in Philately*, by Hugo Salisbury—and that's Saturday, May seventh. . . . And the last one is *An Outline of Paleontology*, by John Morrison—Monday, of course. . . . Ellery, this is really amazing! In every case the *day* coincides with the first two letters of the author's last name!"

"And that's one of the major results of my all-night session," smiled Ellery. "Pretty, isn't it? *Wedjowski*—Wednesday. *Tbrockmorton*—Thursday. *Freyberg*—Friday. *Salisbury*—Saturday. And *Morrison*—Monday, with Sunday obligingly omitted. Coincidence? Hardly, hardly, dad!"

"There's dirty work at the crossroads, all right, my son," said the Inspector with a sudden grin. "This doesn't make any impression on me as far as the murder is concerned, but it's mighty interesting nevertheless. Code, by George!"

"If the murder is worrying you," retorted Ellery, "harken to my point number five. . . . We have five dates so far. April thirteenth, April twenty-first, April twenty-ninth, May seventh, and May sixteenth. Let us suppose, for the sake of blessed argument, that there is a sixth book somewhere in limbo. Then, by all the laws of probability, that sixth book, if it exists, should bear a date eight days from Monday the sixteenth of May, which is—"

The Inspector leaped to his feet. "Why, this is extraordinary, Ellery," he cried. "Tuesday, May twenty-fourth—the day of . . ." His voice fell flatly in a curious disappointment. "No, that's not the day of the murder; it's the day *after* the murder."

"Now, dad," laughed Ellery, "don't go moping so soon because of a little thing like that. It *is* extraordinary, as you say. If a sixth book is extant, then it bears the date of May twenty-fourth. If we can do nothing else at this time, we can certainly suppose the existence of that sixth book. The continuity is too compelling. Things don't merely happen that way. . . . This problematical sixth book gives us our first definite link between the books and the crime. . . . Dad, has it occurred to you that our criminal had to *do* something on Tuesday morning, the twenty-fourth of May?"

The Inspector stared at him. "You think the book—"

"Oh, I think so many things," said Ellery ruefully, rising and stretching his lean figure. "But it does seem to me that we have every reason to believe in the existence of a sixth book. And there is only one possible clue to that sixth book. . . ."

"It's author's name begins with *Tu*," said the Inspector quickly.

"Exactly." Ellery gathered up the tell-tale volumes and stowed them carefully away in a drawer of a large desk. He returned to the table and looked thoughtfully down at his father's grey head with its tiny pink bald spot.

"All night," he said, "I have felt that one person alone can furnish me—willingly—with the missing information. . . . Dad, there is a story behind these codified books, and the story is undoubtedly tied up with the crime. I am so positive of that that I'll bet you a dinner at Pietro's."

"I don't bet," growled the Inspector, twinkling, "at least with you, you dunderhead. And who's this know-it-all?"

"Westley Weaver," replied Ellery. "And he doesn't know it all. I believe that he is withholding some information which to him is meaningless, but which to us may mean a solution of the mystery. I believe that if for any reason he is deliberately withholding this information, that reason concerns Marion French. Poor Wes thinks Marion is up to her knees in the muck of this thing. And perhaps he's right—who knows? At any rate, if there's one person in this whole investigation whom I trust implicitly it's Westley. He's a little dense at times, but he's the real thing. . . . I do believe I'll have a little chat with Westley. It may do us all good to have him down here for a round-table discussion."

He took up the telephone and gave the number of the French store. The Inspector watched him dubiously as he waited.

"Wes? This is Ellery Queen. . . . Can you jump into a

cab, Westley, and come down to my place for a half-hour or so? It's quite important. . . . Yes, drop everything and come over."

26

THE TRAIL TO BERNICE

The Inspector prowled about the apartment in a fever of restlessness. Ellery completed his toilet in the bedroom and listened calmly to his father's occasional outbursts of invective against fate, crime and police commissioners. Djuna, silent as ever, removed the breakfast things from the living-room table and retired to his kitchenette.

"Of course," said the Inspector in a more lucid moment, "Prouty did say that he and Knowles were pretty sure Mrs. French was sitting down when the second shot was fired. That corroborates part of your analysis, anyway."

"It helps," said Ellery, struggling with his shoes. "Expert testimony never hurt any trial, especially when the experts are men like Prouty and Knowles."

Queen snorted. "You haven't seen as many trials as I have. . . . But what gets me is that revolver. Knowles says the bullets are from one of those black .38 Colts that you can buy for a dime a dozen from any 'fence.' Of course, if Knowles could get hold of the gun, he could absolutely establish that the bullets were shot from it, because they still retain enough barrel marks of a unique character to make identification positive. Incidentally, they're both from the same gun. But how on earth can we get hold of it?"

"You're riddling," said Ellery. "I don't know."

"And without the gun we're terribly short of vital evidence. It isn't in the French store—the boys have searched from cellar to roof. Then the murderer took it away with him. Too much to expect that we'll ever get our hands on it."

"Well," remarked Ellery, putting on a smoking-jacket, "I shouldn't be so positive. Criminals do stupid things, dad, as you know better than I. Although I will admit that—"

The doorbell rang imperiously and Ellery started in astonishment. "Why, that can't be Westley so soon!"

The Inspector and Ellery went into the library and found a very dignified little Djuna ushering William Crouther, the French store detective, into the room. Crouther was flushed and excited; he began to speak at once.

"Morning, gentlemen, morning!" he cried genially. "Resting up after a hard day, eh, Inspector? Well, I think I've got something you'll be interested in—yes, sir, that's a fact."

"Glad to see you, Crouther," lied the Inspector, while Ellery's eyes narrowed as if in anticipation of the news Crouther had to transmit. "Sit down, man, and tell us all about it."

"Thank you, thank you, Inspector," said Crouther, sinking into the Inspector's sacred armchair with an explosive sigh. "I haven't been exactly sleeping myself," he announced as a preliminary, chuckling. "Did considerable flat-footing last night and I've been on the go since six this morning."

"Honest toil requireth no reward before heaven," murmured Ellery.

"Eh?" Crouther seemed puzzled, but a grin spread over his florid face as he fumbled in his breast-pocket and produced two oily cigars. "Little joke, eh, Mr. Queen? Smoke, Inspector? You, Mr. Queen? . . . Don't mind if I do myself." He lit the cigar and flicked the burnt match carelessly into the fireplace. A pained spasm passed over the face of Djuna, who was removing the last traces of the breakfast meal from the table. Djuna was tyrannical when

his household was upset. He cast a venomous glance at Crouther's broad back and stumped away into the kitchenette.

"Well, Crouther, what is it?" demanded the Inspector with a crackle of impatience in his voice. "Spill it, spill it!"

"Right you are, Inspector." Crouther lowered his voice mysteriously, leaning forward toward the two men and emphasizing his forthcoming remarks with the butt of his fuming cigar. "What do you think I've been doing?"

"We haven't the slightest idea," said Ellery, with interest.

"I've—been—on—the—trail—of—Bernice Carmody!" whispered Crouther in a vibrant bass voice.

"Oh!" The Inspector was patently disappointed. He regarded Crouther morosely. "Is that all? I've got a squad of my best men on the same job, Crouther."

"Well," said Crouther, leaning back and flicking ashes on the carpet, "I didn't exactly expect you to kiss me at that statement, Inspector—that's a fact. . . . But," his voice lowered cunningly again, "I'll bet your men didn't get what I got!"

"Oh, you got something, did you?" asked the Inspector quickly. "Now, that *is* news, Crouther. Sorry I was so hasty. . . . Just what is it you've dug up?"

Crouther leered triumphantly. "The trail of the girl out of the city!"

Ellery's eyes flickered with sincere surprise. "You got that far, did you?" He turned to his father with a smile. "That seems to be one on Velie, dad."

The Inspector looked disgruntled and curious at the same time. "I'll be hanged for a rascal!" he muttered. "How did you do it and what's the dope exactly, Crouther?"

"It was this way," said Crouther promptly, crossing his legs and puffing smoke into the air. He seemed to be enjoying himself hugely. "I've worked all along—with due

respect to you and your boys, Inspector—on the idea that this Bernice Carmody was done away with. Kidnapped, murdered—I don't know—but somethin' like that. I felt that she didn't do the job, although the signs do point to her, and that's a fact. . . . So I took the liberty of snoopin' around the French house last night and seeing what I could see about how the girl got out of the place. Saw this housekeeper up there and she told me what she told you, I guess. Don't mind, Inspector? . . . Anyway, I found out too about that 'special' who saw her walkin' down the Drive toward 72nd Street. That set me going, and before I got stuck I'd traced her a long way. I found a cruising cab-driver who said he picked up a woman of her description on West End Avenue and 72nd. Private cab, it is; and I guess I was just lucky, that's all. This whole business of trailing is part luck and part perspiration—fact, ain't it, Inspector?"

"Ummh," said the Inspector sourly. "You've certainly put one over on Tom Velie. What then? Get any more?"

"Sure did!" Crouther relit his cigar. "Driver took the girl to the Hotel Astor. She told him to wait for her. She went into the lobby and in about two minutes came out again with a tall blond man dressed kind of swell, and carrying a suitcase. They piled into the cab. Driver said the girl seemed kind of scared, but she didn't say anything, and the tall man told him to take 'em for a drive through Central Park. In the Park, just about the middle, man tapped on the window and told the driver to stop—they were goin' to get out. That was what made the driver kind of leery, anyway—couldn't ever remember anybody payin' off in the middle of the Park. But he didn't say anything, and the blond gent paid the fare and told him to drive off. He did, but not before he'd caught a look at the girl's face. She was pale and sort of half-shot—looked drunk, he said. So he just moved off slow and careless, and

kept his eyes open. And sure enough, he saw the pair of 'em go over to a parked car not fifty feet away, get in, and right away the car shot out of the Park goin' uptown!"

"Well," said the Inspector in a hushed voice, "that's quite a story. We'll have to look over this cab-driver. . . . Did he catch the license-number of the car?"

"Too far away," said Crouther, scowling for an instant. Then his face cleared. "But he wasn't too far away to spot the fact that it had a Massachusetts license-plate."

"Excellent, Crouther, excellent!" cried Ellery suddenly, springing to his feet. "Thank goodness some one has kept his head about him! What kind of car was it—did your man see?"

"Yep," grinned Crouther, expanding under the praise. "Closed car—sedan—dark blue—and a Buick. How's that?"

"Mighty nice work," said the Inspector grudgingly. "How did the girl act on the trip over to the other automobile?"

"Well, the driver couldn't see so well," said Crouther, "but he did tell me that the girl sort of stumbled and the tall man grabbed her arm and sort of forced her."

"Slick, slick!" muttered the Inspector. "Did he catch a glimpse of the driver in the closed car?"

"Nope. But there must have been some one in the Buick, because our man says the couple climbed into the back, and then the car streaked it right out of the Park."

"How about this tall blond man, Crouther?" asked Ellery, puffing furiously at his cigaret. "We should be able to get a fairly complete description of him from the taxicab driver."

Crouther scratched his head. "Never thought of askin' the guy," he confessed. "Here, Inspector—how about your boys taking it up from where I've left off? I got plenty of work at the store, now that things are shot to pieces

down there. . . . Want this driver's name and address?"

"Certainly." The Inspector wrestled inwardly with a spiritual problem as Crouther wrote out the name and address. When the store detective handed it to him it was evident that virtue had won, for he smiled weakly and stretched out his hand. "Let me congratulate you, Crouther. That was a good night's work!"

Crouther pumped the Inspector's hand up and down heartily, grinning. "Glad to help, Inspector—that's a fact. Just goes to prove that us boys on the outside *do* know a thing or two, eh? I always say—"

The doorbell trilled, relieving the Inspector of the embarrassment of having his hand held. Ellery and the old man looked at each other for a fleeting instant. Then Ellery sprang toward the door.

"Expecting company, Inspector?" asked Crouther broadly. "Don't want to butt in. I guess I'd better—"

"No, no, Crouther, stay right where you are! I have an idea you may come in handy," called Ellery rapidly, as he made for the door in the anteroom.

Crouther beamed and sat down again.

Ellery threw open the door. Westley Weaver, his hair rumpled, a worried look on his face, walked hurriedly into the apartment.

27

THE SIXTH BOOK

Weaver shook hands all round, expressed surprise at the presence of Crouther—who shuffled his feet awkwardly and grinned—rubbed his face with one nervous hand, and then sat down, waiting. He eyed the Inspector apprehensively.

Ellery, noting this, smiled. "No cause for neurosis, Wes," he said gently. "This isn't quite a third degree.

Have a cigaret, make yourself comfortable, and listen for a moment."

They drew chairs around the table. Ellery looked at his fingernails thoughtfully.

"We've been muddling over those books I picked up on the desk in French's apartment," he began. "And we've discovered some interesting things there."

"Books?" exclaimed Crouther in a bewildered way.

"Books?" echoed Weaver, but his tone was flat and unconvincing.

"Yes," repeated Ellery, "books. The five volumes that you saw me puzzling over. Westley," and he looked full into the young man's eyes, "I have an idea that somewhere at the back of your mind is a lump of information that we can use. Information about these volumes. To be perfectly frank, I noticed a queer hesitancy on your part when I first got my hooks into them. Just what are your scruples—if you have any—about this story I've laid to you—if there is a story?"

Weaver flushed violently, began to stammer. "Why, Ellery, I never—"

"Look here, Wes." Ellery leaned forward. "There's something on your mind. If it's Marion, let me tell you here and now that none of us has the slightest suspicion of the girl. There may be something behind her nervous attitude, but whatever it is, it isn't criminal, and probably has little to do directly with the murder of Mrs. French. . . . Does that sweep away any scruples in your mind?"

Weaver stared at his friend for a long time. The Inspector and Crouther sat quietly. Then the young man spoke—in a different voice this time, a voice colored with a new confidence. "Yes, it does," he said slowly. "Marion *has* been on my mind, and her possible connection with the affair has made me not quite so frank as I might have been. And I do know something about those books."

Ellery smiled with satisfaction. They waited in silence for Weaver to collect his thoughts.

"You've had occasion," said Weaver at last, lapsing into a clear narrative tone, "to mention a man by the name of Springer. I believe his name arose when you were looking over the nightwatchman's chart, Inspector. You remember that on Monday evening Springer didn't leave the building until seven o'clock, and that I followed him out directly after. These facts were recorded on O'Flaherty's chart."

"Springer?" Ellery frowned. The Inspector nodded.

Weaver looked hesitantly at Crouther and then turned to the Inspector. "Is it all right—?" he began in some embarrassment.

Ellery replied at once for his father. "Perfectly, Wes. Crouther has been in on the case from the beginning, and I imagine he may be of help in the future as well. Go ahead."

"Very well, then," said Weaver. Crouther sank back into his chair complacently. "About two months ago—I forget the exact date—the Accounting Department brought to the attention of Mr. French certain suspicious irregularities in the Book Department. Springer, of course, is head of the department. The irregularities were of a financial nature, and it was thought that receipts were not commensurate with the volume of business. It was a confidential matter, and the Old Man was quite upset about it. There was nothing definite in the Accounting Department's suspicions, and because the whole business was vague, the accountants were ordered to forget all about it temporarily, and the Old Man asked me to conduct a little private investigation of my own."

"Springer, hey?" scowled Crouther. "Funny I didn't hear about it, Mr. Weaver."

"Mr. French didn't believe," explained Weaver, "that

too many people should know about it. The suspicions were just nebulous enough to call for secrecy. And because I handle most of the matters connected with the Old Man personally, he turned to me rather than to any one else. . . . I couldn't, of course," continued Weaver wearily, "do any scouting around during the working day. Springer himself was always there. So I was compelled to do my investigating after hours. I had been checking up sales slips and records for about three or four days in the Book Department, after everybody had left the building, as I thought, when one evening I got wind of something queer. I might say that my few nights' snooping hadn't got me anywhere—everything seemed all right."

The Queens and Crouther were listening now with strained attention.

"The night I've referred to," went on Weaver, "I was about to enter the Book Department when I noticed an unusual brightness—a number of lamps were lit up. My first thought was that somebody was working overtime, and when I looked in cautiously the thought seemed corroborated. It was Springer, alone, pottering about in the aisles of the Department. I don't know exactly what made me keep out of sight—perhaps it was the fact that I was already suspicious of him—but I did, and watched curiously to see what he was doing.

"I saw him go over to one of the wall-shelves, after looking around with a furtive air, and swiftly take down a book. He took a long patent pencil from his pocket and, opening the book somewhere at the back, he made a rapid notation with the pencil. He snapped the book shut, made some sort of mark on the back-board, and immediately placed the book on a different shelf. I noted that he seemed quite anxious about *how* he placed the book; he fussed with it for several moments before he seemed satisfied. And that was all. He entered his private office in the rear and

reappeared shortly after wearing his hat and coat. He then walked out of the Department, almost brushing by me as I stood huddled in a little alcove in the shadow. A few moments later the lights, except for one or two bulbs kept lit all night, snapped out. I found out later that he had checked out the regular way, informing the nightwatchman that he was through for the night, and that O'Flaherty should have the switch for the book section turned off."

"That doesn't seem so flukey to me," said Crouther. "Probably just part of his job."

"When you're looking for suspicious activity," said the Inspector vaguely, "you can generally find it."

"I had something of the same thought," replied Weaver. "It was a trifle peculiar to find Springer working overtime in the first place—the practice is rather discouraged by Mr. French. But then the incident itself might be perfectly innocent. I did go over to that shelf after Springer had gone and inquisitively I took down the book he had just placed there. I turned to the back and on an inside leaf I found in pencil a date and a street-and-number address."

"An address?" Both Ellery and the Inspector exclaimed simultaneously. "What was it?" demanded the Inspector.

"I forget just now," said Weaver, "but I have a note of it in my pocket. Would you like—?"

"Never mind the address at the moment," said Ellery with a curious calm. "I'm not quite clear on this matter of the five books I took from French's desk. Are they the actual books Springer marked?"

"No, they're not," replied Weaver. "But perhaps I had better give you my story in something like a sequence of incidents. It's rather complicated. . . . After noticing the date and address, which I couldn't figure out at all as far as a possible meaning was concerned, I examined the back-board on which I had seen Springer write something.

I found it was merely a light pencil-line under the name of the author."

"That back-board fascinated me from the moment you mentioned it," mused Ellery. "Are you sure, Westley, that the mark was under the *entire* name? Wasn't it perhaps under *the first two letters*?"

Weaver stared. "Why, so it was," he cried. "But how on earth could you know, Ellery?"

"Guess-work," said Ellery negligently. "But it follows. No wonder," he said, turning to his father, "I couldn't get more out of these books, dad. They aren't the originals. . . . Go on, Wes."

"I had no reason then," continued Weaver, "to take decisive action about that book. I merely noted the address and date and, after slipping the book back into the exact place in which Springer had originally set it, I went about my business of checking up on Springer's records. As a matter of fact, I forgot about the whole thing. It wasn't until the following week—nine days, to be exact—that the incident was recalled to my mind."

"Springer did the same thing, I'll bet!" cried Crouther.

"Bravo, Crouther," murmured Ellery.

Weaver smiled fleetingly and went on. "Yes, under the same circumstances Springer did the same thing, and because I had gone down into the Book Department on my regular nightly check-up, I caught him at it again. This time I was puzzled to note that he repeated his performance of the week before in every detail. And the business still didn't register any meaning in my mind. I merely jotted down the address and date once more—they were different from the previous week's, incidentally—and went about my business. It wasn't until the third week—after eight days had passed—that my suspicions began to function a little more actively."

"Then," said Ellery, "you took a duplicate of the book,

and the book was *Fourteenth Century Trade and Commerce*, by a gentleman named Stani Wedjowski."

"Correct," said Weaver. "On that third occasion, it came to me that the addresses were of vital importance. What that importance was I had no idea. But I realized that the books were there for some purpose, and I decided to try a little experiment. In the case of the Wedjowski book, after Springer had gone I got another copy of the book, marked the date in the back for reference, made a private note of the new address, and took the duplicate book back upstairs with me to study. Perhaps, I thought, there's something *about* this book that will enlighten me. I left the original exactly where Springer had placed it, naturally.

"I studied that book until I was blue in the face. I couldn't make a thing of it. And I repeated my tactics for the next four weeks—Springer did his mysterious little job every eight days, I noticed—and studied my duplicate books very assiduously. They didn't make sense, and I was getting desperate. I might add that all this time I had been keeping tabs on Springer's records, and I was just beginning to see light. Springer was taking advantage of the one flaw in the departmental system, and was falsifying his accounts in a devilishly clever manner. And then I knew that the books must have some significance—whether connected with my own investigation or not I didn't know. But I had no doubt now that they signified something crooked.

"At any rate, by the sixth week I was quite desperate. This was Monday evening—the night of the murder, although I had no idea of what was going to happen within a few hours. I watched Springer as usual, saw him go through the customary ritual, and leave. But this time I meant to do a daring thing. *I took the original book.*"

"Good for you!" cried Ellery. He lit a cigaret with unsteady fingers. "Brilliant, in fact. Go on, Wes; this is

tremendously exciting." The Inspector said nothing; Crouther regarded Weaver with a new respect.

"I duplicated the markings in another book exactly and placed it where Springer had left the original, which I took away with me. I had to do these things in a hurry, because I meant to follow Springer that night to see if I could get any clue from his movements. I was in luck, because he had stopped to chat with O'Flaherty. As I dashed out of the building, Springer's latest book under my arm, I was just in time to see him turn the corner on Fifth Avenue."

"Regular detective," remarked Crouther admiringly.

"Well, hardly," laughed Weaver. "At any rate I followed Springer's wandering trail all evening. He had dinner alone in a Broadway restaurant and then went to a movie. I stuck to his trail like the fool I am, I suppose, because he did nothing at all suspicious, telephoned no one, spoke to no one, all evening. Finally, about midnight, he got home—he lives in the Bronx in an apartment house. I watched that house for an hour—even pussyfooted up to the floor on which his apartment is. But Springer stayed in. And so I finally went home, still carrying Springer's book, but no wiser when I left him than when I'd begun to follow."

"Nevertheless," said the Inspector, "you showed good judgment in sticking to him."

"What's the title of that sixth book and where is it? How does it happen that I didn't find it among the five others in French's apartment? You put the five books there, of course?" asked Ellery rapidly.

"One at a time," pleaded Weaver, smiling. "The book is *Modern Trends in Interior Decoration*, by Lucian Tucker. . . ." Ellery and the Inspector exchanged glances at Weaver's mention of the author's name. "You didn't find it among the other five because I didn't leave it there. I took it home with me. You see, I felt all along that the

duplicates weren't important. It was evidently the originals that counted. Perhaps I was wrong, but I certainly figured that the sixth, being an original, was more precious than the other five. So I put it in a safe place Monday night when I got home—my own bedroom. As for the five, the reason I kept them at the store was that I was studying them at odd moments and wanted them handy. I didn't want to bother the Old Man about them and the whole business, because he was having his hands full negotiating this merger with Whitney, and he always leaves details to me, anyway. So I merely slipped each book, as I got it, between the book-ends on the Old Man's desk. I also took away one of the Old Man's books to keep the count similar; and merely hid them in the bookcase, behind odd volumes there. In this way, by the end of five weeks the Old Man's five books had entirely disappeared into the bookcase, and the duplicates of Springer's books were between the book-ends. I meant to explain if the Old Man noticed the new volumes on his desk, but he didn't, so I didn't bother. Those 'favorites' of his are mere atmosphere, anyhow; he'd got so accustomed to seeing them there on his desk that he sort of took it for granted they were still there, even though he was up and about that desk every day for weeks. It often happens that way. . . . As for Springer noticing the strange books on the desk, that was impossible. Springer never had occasion to come to Mr. French's apartment."

"Then I take it," demanded Ellery, with a creeping light of animation in his eyes, "that you put the five books between the book-ends week for week? In other words, that the first book, the Wedjowski thing, was on that desk six weeks ago?"

"Exactly."

"That's *most* interesting," said Ellery, and subsided in his chair.

The Inspector stirred into action. "Here, Weaver, let's have a look at those addresses. You have them on you, I think you said?"

For answer, Weaver took a small notebook from his breast-pocket and extracted a slip of paper. The Inspector, Ellery and Crouther bent curiously over to read the seven addresses.

"Well, I'll be—" The Inspector's voice was hushed, quietly throbbing. "Ellery, do you know what these are? Here are *two* addresses that Fiorelli's boys have had under suspicion for weeks as depots for the distribution of dope!"

Ellery dropped back thoughtfully, while Crouther and Weaver stared at each other. "I'm not particularly surprised," said Ellery. "Two, eh? That means all seven are probably dope-distributing headquarters . . . changed from week to week . . . clever, no doubt about it!" Suddenly he started forward. "Wes!" he almost shouted, "the sixth address! Where is it? Quickly!"

Weaver hastily produced another memorandum. The address was a number on East 98th Street.

"Dad," said Ellery at once, "this is remarkable luck. Do you realize what we've in our hands? *Yesterday's dope depot!* The date—May twenty-fourth—Tuesday—the trail is so hot it sparks!"

"By the lord Harry," muttered the Inspector, "you're right. If that 98th Street place should still be tenanted—I can't see why not—" He sprang to his feet and reached for the telephone. He gave the number of Police Headquarters and in a moment was speaking to Sergeant Velie. He spoke rapidly, had his call switched to the office of the Narcotic Squad. He spoke tersely to Fiorelli, head of the Squad, and hung up.

"I've just tipped off Fiorelli and they're going to raid that 98th Street address immediately," he said briskly, taking a pinch of snuff with practiced fingers. "They're tak-

ing Thomas with them, and they'll stop here to pick us up. I want to be in on this one!" His jaw stiffened grimly.

"Raid, hey?" Crouther rose and tightened his muscles. "Mind if I go along, Inspector? Be a picnic for me—that's a fact!"

"No objection at all, Crouther," said the Inspector absently. "You deserve a bit of the show, anyway. . . . Fiorelli has raided those two addresses I recognized, but in each case the birds had shut up shop and disappeared. Let's hope they haven't had time in this case!"

Ellery opened his mouth as if to speak, then clamped his lips together very firmly. He became thoughtful at once.

Weaver seemed confounded by the bombshell he had caused to explode. He subsided limply in his chair.

28

UNRAVELING THREADS

They all looked at Ellery in sudden disquiet. Crouther, his mouth half-open, shut it and began to scratch his head. Weaver and the Inspector shifted heavily in their chairs at the same instant.

Ellery without a word stepped into the kitchenette. His low voice was heard murmuring to Djuna. Ellery reappeared, fumbled for his pince-nez and began to twirl it idly. "The uneasy thought just struck me—and yet," his face brightened, "it isn't so bad at that!"

He replaced his glasses on his thin nose and rose to his feet, pacing leisurely up and down before the table. Djuna slipped out of the kitchenette and left the apartment.

"While we're waiting for the squad wagon," Ellery said, "we may as well go over some of the ground, in the light of these newest disclosures of Westley's."

"Does anybody doubt now that French's is being used as an important medium for drug distribution?"

He challenged them lightly with his eyes. An angry glare lit up Crouther's heavy features.

"Say, Mr. Queen, that's pretty rough on me," he barked. "I'm not denying this Springer guy is a crook—don't see how it could be otherwise—but how do you figure out a dope ring's been operating right under our noses at the store?"

"Keep your shirt on, Crouther," said Ellery mildly. "They've merely put one over on the French establishment. What an opportunity," he went on, in the tone of one who finds much to admire, "for a drug ring! Using a no doubt simple code, which is already fairly clarified in my mind, transmitting it through innocent books, and setting the whole business in the respectable domain of the head of the Anti-Vice League himself! That's a stroke of genius, that is. . . . Look here. There can't be an alternative. We find at intervals of eight days—the only exception being one of nine, and this is plausibly accounted for by the intervention of Sunday—the head of the Book Department marking an address in—and this is one of the beautiful elements of the scheme—in little-used, stodgy books. . . . Did you notice that the date in each book was *not* the date when Springer prepared it? No, in every case it was for the day *following*. The book marked Wednesday, by the author whose name began with WE, was placed on the *same* shelf . . . it was the same shelf every week, wasn't it, Wes?"

"Yes."

"The book marked for Wednesday, then, was placed on the same shelf as all the others on Tuesday evening. The Thursday book on Wednesday evening the week following, and so on. What could this possibly mean? Obviously, that Springer didn't allow too much time to elapse between the evening he prepared the book with the address and *the time it was to be picked up!*"

"Picked up?" demanded the Inspector.

"Of course. Everything points to a well-constructed plan of operation in which Springer's main job was to inform some one of an address through the medium of a book. If Springer could inform that problematical person or persons by word of mouth, why the complicated book-code system? No. The probability is that Springer knows the people who come in to pick up his doctored volumes, but that they, being mere pawns, don't know him. But this is really beside the point. The crux of the matter is that Springer would not allow the prepared book to linger on the shelf too long. It might be purchased; the address in it might inadvertently be noticed by a stranger. Dad, if you were in Springer's place, how would you arrange *the time* when the book should be picked up?"

"Seems clear. If Springer prepared it at night, then he would have it picked up in the morning."

Ellery smiled. "Exactly. What risk then does he run? He writes the address in the book after hours, when the book cannot be removed that night in a legitimate way by an outsider; and the very next morning the appointed messenger takes it from its place on the shelf—a place of course set definitely when the plan was originally concocted. The chances are, in fact, that the messenger arrives as early as possible the next morning—perhaps as soon as the store opens, at nine o'clock. He browses around, goes over to the shelf finally, picks up the book he knows about in advance through a sign which I'll explain in a moment, pays for it in the regular way and walks out with his information under his arm—safe, clean and ridiculously easy.

"Now! There are a few inferences to be drawn. We must suppose that when the messenger arrives in the morning he has no contact with Springer—really, everything

points to this complete alienation between Springer and the messenger, with one or both ignorant of the other's identity. Then the only clue the messenger has to the book fixed the night before is a code, or system, arranged beforehand. That's just common sense. But what could the code be? And that is the beautiful part of the plan.

"Why, I asked myself, was it necessary to the plan to have the author's name—at least its first two letters—coincide with the first two letters of the day on which the book was to be picked up by the messenger? The question is answered if we suppose complete ignorance of detail on the part of the messenger. If, when he got his job, his first instructions, he was told the following, then the whole procedure becomes clear: 'Every week you are to call at the French Book Department for a book which will contain an address. The book will be on the top shelf of the fourth tier of book-racks situated in such and such a place in the Department. The book will always be on that shelf. . . . Now. Every week you are to call on a different day. Eight days apart, to be exact. Except when Sunday intervenes, and then it will be nine days—from the preceding Saturday to the following Monday. Let us say the morning you are due to call for the book is a Wednesday. Then the book you should pick up will be by an author whose last name begins with a *WE*, to correspond to the *WE* of Wednesday. To make identification absolutely positive, and to get you out of the Book Department as quickly as possible, so that you will not be compelled to rummage through every book on that shelf, a light pencil-mark will appear on the first two letters of the author's name, positively identifying the proper volume. You pick up the book, look at the back inner leaf to make sure the address is there, then buy the book and walk out of the store.' . . . Does that sound plausible?"

There was a vehement chorus of assents from the three men.

"It's a devilishly ingenious scheme," said Ellery thoughtfully, "if a little complicated. Really, though, the complications iron themselves away with the passage of time. The beauty of the plan is that the messenger needs his instructions *only once*, the first time, and he can carry on indefinitely, for months, without a slip-up. . . . The next Thursday he has to look for a pencil-mark on a book whose author's last name begins with *TH*; the Friday following, an *FR*; and so on. What the messenger does with the book when he gets it is debatable. From the look of things, this is a highly centralized society of drug distributors, with the pawns in the game knowing as little as possible about the business at hand, probably being kept in complete ignorance of the ringleader or leaders. The question naturally arises—"

"But why," asked Weaver, "that period of *eight* days? Why not merely every week on the same day?"

"A good question, and it has, I think, a simple answer," replied Ellery. "These people were taking not the slightest chance of a slip-up. If a certain person came into the Book Department at nine o'clock *every Monday*, he might after a time be noticed and remarked on. But coming in on a Monday, then a Tuesday, then a Wednesday, all a week and a day apart, there was little likelihood that he would be remembered."

"My God, what a racket!" muttered Crouther. "No wonder we never got wind of it!"

"Clever's no name for it," sighed the Inspector. "Then you think, Ellery, that the addresses are all local 'joints' for the selling of the dope?"

"No question about it," said Ellery, lighting another cigaret. "And while we're remarking about cleverness,

how does this strike you? The ring never uses the same address twice! That's patent from the different address each week. And it's apparent, too, that their system of distribution makes it a methodical weekly affair. Your Narcotic Squad has a chance to ferret out a drug depot if it's used week after week; people notice suspicious activity, perhaps; the address and the word go around through the grapevine of the underworld. But how can your Squad ever get on the track of a gang which uses a *different* depot every week? Why, the scheme is amazing. As it is, Fiorelli did get wind of two of the addresses through informers or stool-pigeons; the fact that he didn't get any other shows how holeproof the plot really is. And of course, when he raided the places, he found the ring gone—cleared out. They probably have an afternoon *soirée* week after week and dismantle the place immediately after the last customer's gone.

"Now consider how safe the ring really is. They must have a regular channel of communication with their customers—and I suspect it's a limited list. Too many would be dangerous by their very numbers. That means, then, that the customers are wealthy, probably society people, who get a weekly tipoff by telephone, we'll say—just an address. They know the rest. And what can the customer do? What does he *want* to do? We all know the desperate, uncontrollable craving of the addict for his drug. Here he has a safe source of supply, and what's more important, a regular source of supply. No—the customers aren't blabbing. What could be sweeter?"

"It staggers the imagination," muttered the Inspector. "What a plan! But if we clean them up this time—!"

"I need only refer to the well-known cup and the better-known lip," laughed Ellery. "However, we'll see.

"Some questions arise, as I began to say a few moments

ago, more directly applicable to the murder. We may certainly presume that Bernice is—or was—one of the ring's customers. And I do believe that shady, mysterious motive of which we haven't been able to grasp the merest shadow, is beginning to emerge into daylight. Winifred French was not an addict. She carried in her bag a lipstick belonging to Bernice and filled with heroin. . . . And carried it to her death. A strong line of incident, dad! Very, very strong. . . . Interesting, isn't it, especially since we haven't been able to discover any other motive for the crime? But motive won't mean much in the unraveling of this case, I'm afraid; the big job is to corral the murderer and also to round up the drug ring. A dual task which presents to my deduction-weary mind a suggestion of difficulty. . . .

"Another question. Is Springer pawn or king in this drug game? My guess is—he's on the inside, knows all the facts, but is not top man. And the question naturally arises, too—did Mr. Springer fire the lethal weapon aimed at Mrs. French's heart? I'd rather not go into that at the moment.

"And finally, doesn't this business of the drug ring indicate that Winifred's murder—and Bernice's disappearance—are integral parts of the same crime, rather than two unrelated crimes? I think it does, but I cannot see how we shall ever get to the truth of the matter unless—a certain eventuality occurs. Deponent being temporarily out of wind, deponent will sit down and think of the case *in toto*."

And Ellery, without another word, seated himself and worried his pince-nez in a thoroughly absent manner.

The Inspector, Weaver and Crouther sighed all at once. They were sitting that way, silently, looking at each other, when a short siren blast from the street below announced the arrival of Fiorelli, Velie and the raiding party.

RAID!

The police van, crammed with detectives and officers, rushed through the West Side, headed uptown. Traffic opened magically before its wailing siren. Hundreds of eyes followed its reckless course wonderingly.

The Inspector shouted to a grim and chagrined Velie, above the roar of the exhaust, Crouther's story of the lone taxicab driver and the mysterious automobile with the Massachusetts license-plate. The Sergeant gloomily promised an immediate check-up on the chauffeur's story and dissemination of the new information to all his operatives on the trail of the vanished girl. Crouther sat chuckling by his side as Velie took from the Inspector's hand the name and address of the cab-driver.

Weaver had been excused, and with the arrival of the van had left to return to the French store.

Fiorelli sat quietly chewing his fingernails. His face was haggard and feverish as he pulled the Inspector to one side.

"Had a bunch of boys beat it up to the 98th Street address beforehand to surround the house," he boomed hoarsely. "Not taking any chances on their doing a fade-away. The boys are keeping under cover, but they won't let a rat slip through the net!"

Ellery sat calmly in the van, watching the crowds jump into view and disappear. His fingers thrummed a rhythmic tattoo on the iron mesh obscuring the view.

The powerful truck turned into 98th Street and dashed eastward. The neighborhood thickened, grew squalid. As the van plunged further toward the East River the on-rushing scene became one of ramshackle buildings and ramshackle humanity. . . .

At last the police car ground to a stop. A man in plain clothes had stepped suddenly from a doorway into the

middle of the street, pointing meaningly toward a low, two-story building of rotten wood and peeled paint, leaning crazily over the sidewalk as if the slightest convulsion of nature would topple it, a brittle wreck, into the gutter. The front door was closed. The windows were heavily shaded. The house looked tenantless, lifeless.

With the first grinding of the van's brakes, a dozen men in plain clothes ran into view from odd corners and doorways. Several in the dilapidated backyard of the house drew guns and advanced on the rear of the building. An avalanche of policemen and detectives poured out of the truck, headed by Fiorelli, Velie and the Inspector, Crouther close behind, and ran up the crumbling wooden steps to the front door.

Fiorelli pounded fiercely on the cracked panels. There was not a whisper of audible response. At a sign from Inspector Queen Velie and Fiorelli put their formidable shoulders to the door and shoved. The wood splintered and the door cracked back, revealing a dim, musty interior, a broken old chandelier, and a flight of uncarpeted steps leading up to a second floor.

The police streamed into the building, investing both floors simultaneously, opening doors, pushing into corners, guns ready.

And Ellery, sauntering leisurely behind, openly amused at the psychology of the gaping mob which had miraculously gathered outside the house, kept back by the clubs of several bluecoats, saw at once that the raid was a failure.

The house was empty, without the least sign of occupancy.

They stood about in one of the dusty, deserted rooms—an old-fashioned parlor, with the battered remains of a

Victorian fireplace mutely proclaiming its fall upon evil days—and talked quietly. Fiorelli was beside himself with impotent rage. His dark beefy face was the color of slate; he kicked a charred piece of wood across the room. Velie looked glummer than usual. The Inspector took the unsuccessful termination of the raid more philosophically. He inhaled snuff and sent one of the detectives in search of a caretaker, or superintendent, if there was one to be found in the neighborhood.

Ellery said nothing.

The detective returned shortly with a strapping, livid Negro.

"Do you take care of this house?" asked the Inspector brusquely of the Negro.

The Negro removed his rusty derby and shuffled his feet. "'Spects so, yassuh!"

"What are you—janitor, superintendent?"

"Kinda, suh. Ah takes care of a whole passel o' houses on dis block. Rents 'em fo' de ownahs when a tenant comes 'long."

"I see. Was this house occupied yesterday?"

The Negro bobbed his head vigorously. "Yassuh! 'Bout fo'-five days ago party comes 'long an' rents de whole house. Da's wha' de agent says when he brung 'm down. Paid de agent cash money fo' a month. Saw it wiv mah own eyes."

"What sort of man was the tenant?"

"Kinda shortish an' had a long black mustache, suh."

"When did he move in?"

"De nex' day—Sunday, Ah don' doubt. Van come moseyin' down wiv some fu'niture."

"Did you see the name of the van company on the truck?"

"Nosuh, sho' didn't. Dey weren't none. One o' dese

open trucks wiv de sides covuhed wiv black ta'paulin. No name on de truck a-tall."

"Did you see the man with the black mustache around much?"

The Negro scratched his short woolly thatch. "Nosuh, kain't say Ah did. Don't believe Ah seed him a-tall till yestiddy mo'nin'."

"How was that?"

"Dat's when he moved out agin, suh. Didn't say nuffin' to me, but jes' about eleven o'clock in de mo'nin' de same truck she rolls up to de do' and de two drivuhs dey goes into de house an' purty soon dey stahts pilin' de fu'niture out o' de house an' into de truck. Didn't take 'em long—dey wan't much fu'niture, an' den Ah sees de boss-man come out o' de house, say sumpin' to de drivuhs, an' walk away. De truck went away, too. Yassuh, an' de boss-man jes' flung dat key de agent gave'm right out deah on de stoop o' de house befo' he walked off. Yassuh."

The Inspector spoke in a low voice to Velie for a moment, then turned back to the Negro.

"Did you see anybody go into the house during the four days?" asked the Inspector. "Especially Tuesday afternoon—yesterday?"

"Why—yassuh, yestiddy, but not befo'. Mah old 'ooman, she sets out yonduh gen'ally all day, an' she told me las' night dat dey was a whole raft o' white folks comin' up to dat empty house all yestiddy aftuhnoon. Dey was all kinda put out when dey saw de house was closed. Oh, 'bout a dozen of 'em. Dey all went away quick."

"That'll do," said the Inspector slowly. "Give your name and address and the name of the realty company you're working for to that man over there, and keep your mouth tight about all this. Remember!"

The Negro stiffened, mumbled, stammered the required

information to a detective of the Narcotic Squad, and shuffled rapidly from the room.

"Well, that settles it," said Inspector Queen to Velie, Fiorelli, Ellery and Crouther, who were grouped together. "They got wind and beat it. Something made 'em suspicious and they had to clear out—didn't even have time to distribute the dope to their customers. There must be a dozen mighty sick addicts in the city to-day."

Fiorelli made a disgusted gesture. "Aw, let's fade," he growled. "They got a jinx on me, that gang."

"Tough luck," said Crouther. "That must have been fast work."

"I'm going to trace that truck, if I can," said Velie. "Want to help, Crouther?" He smiled sardonically.

"Hey, lay off," said Crouther good-naturedly.

"Don't quarrel, now," sighed the Inspector. "You might try, Thomas, but I have a notion that's a privately owned truck that operates only on the ring's jobs. And I suppose that now the gang is scared off, we'll not pick up their trail again in a hurry. Eh, Ellery?"

"I suggest," said Ellery, speaking for the first time since the raid, "that we go home. We've met our Waterloo for—" he smiled sadly—"to put it mildly, the nonce."

Fiorelli and Velie mustered the squad of officers and took the police van back to Headquarters, leaving a bluecoat on guard outside the 98th Street shack. Crouther, poking Velie slyly in the ribs as the burly Sergeant swung into the truck, departed early for the French store.

"They'll be sendin' out an alarm for me," he grinned. "After all, I got a job."

He hailed a cruising taxicab which headed west and south. The Queens followed suit in another cab.

Ellery took out his thin silver watch in the car and stared at its dial with amused eyes. The Inspector regarded him in a puzzled way.

"I can't see why you want to go home," he grumbled. "I'm a long time overdue at my office now. There must be a pile of work on my desk. I've missed the morning line-up for the first time in months, and I suppose Welles has called again, and—"

Ellery stared fixedly at his watch, a faint smile on his lips. The Inspector subsided, muttering.

Ellery paid the cab-driver when the taxi drew up before their brownstone on 87th Street, herded his father gently upstairs, and did not speak until Djuna had closed the door behind them.

"Ten minutes," he announced with satisfaction, snapping the watchcase shut and returning the watch to his vest-pocket. "That's average time, I should say, from 98th Street and the River to 87th Street on the other side." He grinned and threw off his light coat.

"Have you gone fay?" gasped the Inspector.

"Like a fox," said Ellery. He took up the telephone and called a number. "French's? Connect me with Mr. Springer in the Book Department. . . . Hello, Book Department? Mr. Springer, please. . . . What? Who is this speaking? . . . Oh, I see. . . . No, it's quite all right. Thank you!"

He hung up.

The Inspector was twisting his mustache in an agony of apprehension. He glared at Ellery. "Do you mean to say that Springer's—" he began in a thunderous voice.

Ellery seemed not perturbed. "I'm so glad," he said with sly simplicity. "Mr. Springer, according to his young lady assistant, was taken suddenly ill not five minutes ago and left in something of a hurry, saying he would not return to-day."

The old man sank into his chair worriedly. "How under heaven could I have anticipated this?" he said. "I surely

thought he'd keep until later in the day. Return, he said, did he? We'll never set eyes on him again!"

"Oh, but you shall," said Ellery gently.

And quoth Ellery: "'Preparation is half the battle, and nothing is lost by being on one's guard.' The good Spanish don uttered a homely truth there, padre!"

31

ALIBIS: MARION-ZORN

Muttering imprecations upon the elusive head of James Springer, the Inspector departed for a flying visit to Headquarters, leaving Ellery hunched comfortably before the open dormer-window, smoking and thinking. Djuna, in his uncanny simian way, sat motionless on the floor at his feet, unblinking in the soft glare of sunlight streaming into the room. . . . When the Inspector returned two hours later Ellery, still smoking, was seated at the desk reading over a batch of notes.

"Still at it?" asked Queen with quick concern, hurling his hat and coat toward a chair. Djuna noiselessly picked them up and hung them in a closet.

"Still at it," rejoined Ellery. But there was a deep wrinkle between his brows. He rose, looked reflectively at his notes, then with a sigh replaced them in the desk and shrugged his shoulders. The wrinkle disappeared, dissolved smoothly into small fine lines of humor as he caught sight of his father's worried mustache and high color.

"Nothing new downtown?" he asked sympathetically. He sat down at the window again.

Queen paced nervously up and down the rug. "Little enough. Thomas has looked up that cab-driver of Crouther's—and we've driven up another blind alley, it seems. The man gave us a pretty clear description of this tall blond abductor, and of course we've flashed wires

through the entire East. Particularly Massachusetts. With a description of the car and Bernice Carmody. Now I suppose we'll have to wait. . . ."

"Umm." Ellery flicked the ashes from his cigaret. "Waiting won't bring Bernice Carmody back from the grave," he said in sudden earnestness. "And there's still a chance she may be alive. . . . I shouldn't confine my search to the northeast, dad. This gang is clever. They may have pulled the old license-plate trick. They may actually have headed south, changed cars—any one of a dozen things. In fact, if you found Bernice Carmody, dead or alive, right here in New York City, it wouldn't surprise me in the least. After all, the trail ended in Central Park. . . ."

"Thomas has his eyes open and his beaters out," said the Inspector disconsolately. "And he's up to the tricks as well as you, my son. If there's the faintest spoor, he'll follow it—and get not only the girl but the men too."

"*Cherchez la femme*," said Ellery lightly. . . . He sat musing. The Inspector placed his hands behind his small back and strode up and down, eying Ellery in a puzzled manner meanwhile.

"Marion French called me at Headquarters," he stated suddenly.

Ellery's head lifted slowly. "Yes?"

The old man chuckled. "I thought that would get you! . . . Yes, the girl called several times this morning while I was here, and when I finally got to the office she seemed quite feverish with—well, not excitement exactly, but anticipation. So, being thoughtful of you, my son—which is more than you can say about yourself, incidentally—I asked her to meet me here."

Ellery merely smiled.

"I suppose Weaver's been talking to her," continued the Inspector grumpily.

"Dad!" Ellery laughed outright. "Occasionally you positively startle me with your insight. . . ."

The doorbell rang, and Djuna ran to answer it. Marion French, dressed in a severe black suit and a pert little black hat, her chin set at a charmingly defiant angle, stood outside.

Ellery sprang to his feet, his fingers straying to his tie. The Inspector stepped forward quickly and opened wide the anteroom door.

"Come in, come in, Miss French!" He was all smiles and fatherliness. Marion smiled bewilderingly at Djuna and greeted the Inspector in a grave undertone as she walked into the living-room. She blushed at Ellery's warm words of welcome. And sat down in the Inspector's own armchair at his magnanimous command, perched on the edge of the leather seat, hands tightly clasped, chiseled lips firm.

Ellery stood by the window. The Inspector drew up a chair and sat close to the girl, facing her.

"Now, what is it you wanted to talk to me about, my dear?" he asked in a conversational tone.

Marion's glance flew timidly to Ellery and returned. "I— It's about—"

"About your visit to Mr. Zorn's place Monday evening, Miss French?" inquired Ellery, smiling.

She gasped. "Why—why, you knew!"

Ellery made a deprecatory gesture. "It is hardly knowledge. Some call it guessing."

The Inspector's eyes bored into hers. But his voice was gentle now. "Has Mr. Zorn a hold over you—or is it a matter more directly concerned with your father, my dear?"

She stared from one to the other as if she could not believe her ears. "To think—" She laughed a trifle hysterically. "And I thought all the while that it was a

deep, dark secret. . . .” A shadow seemed to lift from her face all at once. “I suppose you want a coherent story. You have heard, Westley tells me—” she bit her lip and crimsoned—“I shouldn’t have said that—he told me *particularly* not to say we’d discussed this. . . .” Both the Inspector and Ellery laughed aloud at her *naïveté*. “At any rate,” she went on, smiling faintly, “I gather that you’ve heard about—about my stepmother and Mr. Zorn. . . . Really, it was more gossip than anything else!” she cried. She calmed immediately. “But I wasn’t sure. And we all tried—so hard—to keep the nasty rumors from father. I’m afraid we weren’t entirely successful.” Fear suddenly flamed in her eyes. She stopped short and looked down at the floor.

Ellery and the Inspector exchanged glances. “Go on, Miss French,” said the Inspector in the same soothing tone.

“Then”—she spoke more rapidly now—“I overheard, quite by accident, something that confirmed part of the rumors. Nothing—it hadn’t gone far, their affair, but it was getting dangerous. Even I could see that. . . . That’s the way things were on Monday.”

“You told your father?” asked Queen.

She shivered. “Oh, no! But I had to save daddy’s health, his reputation, his—his peace of mind. I didn’t even take Westley into my confidence. He would have forbidden me to do—what I did. I called on Mr. Zorn—and his wife.”

“Go on.”

“I went to their apartment. I was frankly desperate. It was just after dinner and I knew they’d both be at home. And I wanted Mrs. Zorn to be there, because she knew—and she was as jealous as a witch. She’d even threatened—”

“Threatened, Miss French?” demanded the Inspector.

“Oh, it was nothing, Inspector,” said Marion hurriedly, “but it told me that she knew what was going on. And

it was as much her fault that Mr. Zorn fell in love with—
with Winifred as anything. Mrs. Zorn is—oh, quite
awful. . . .” She smiled wanly. “You’ll think me a
scandalous gossip. . . . But before both of them I accused
Mr. Zorn, and—and told him it must stop. Mrs. Zorn
flew into a terrible rage and began to swear. All her
spite turned against Winifred. She threatened dire things.
Mr. Zorn tried to argue with me, but—I suppose the
weight of two women railing at him just sapped his
strength. He left his apartment in a huff—left me with
that awful woman. She looked almost insane . . .”
Marion shuddered. “So I became a little frightened and—
well, I suppose it *was* a good deal like running. I could
hear her screaming even in the corridor. . . . And—and
that’s all, Inspector Queen, that’s all,” she faltered. “When
I left the Zorns’ apartment it was a little after ten. I felt
weak and sick. I really did walk in the Park, as I told
you yesterday at the store. I walked and walked until I
thought I’d drop from exhaustion, and then I went home.
It was just about midnight.”

There was a little silence. Ellery, watching the girl
impassively, turned his head away. The Inspector cleared
his throat.

“You went directly to bed, Miss French?” he asked.

The girl stared at him. “Why, what do you mean? . . .
I—” Fright gleamed again in her eyes. But she said
courageously, “Yes, Inspector, I did.”

“Did any one see you come into the house?”

“No—no.”

“You saw no one, spoke to no one?”

“No.”

The Inspector frowned. “Well! At any rate, Miss
French, you did the right thing—the only thing—in telling
us about it.”

“I didn’t want to,” she said in a small voice. “But

Westley, when I told him to-day, said I must. And so—"

"Why didn't you want to?" asked Ellery. It was the first time he had spoken since Marion had begun her story.

The girl did not speak for a long moment. Finally, with a determined expression, she said: "I'd rather not answer that, Mr. Queen," and rose.

The Inspector was on his feet instantly. He escorted her to the door in an animate silence.

When he returned, Ellery was chuckling. "As transparent as any angel," he said. "Don't frown so, dad. Have you checked up on our good friend Cyrus French?"

"Oh, that!" The Inspector looked unhappy. "Yes, I had Johnson working on it last night. Got his report this morning. He was at Whitney's in Great Neck, all right. I understand he had a slight attack of indigestion about nine o'clock Monday night. Retired immediately."

"Coincidence?" Ellery grinned.

"Eh?" Queen scowled. "At any rate, that accounts for him."

"Oh, yes?" Ellery sat down and crossed his long legs. "Purely as an intellectual exercise," he said mischievously, "it does nothing of the kind. You see, old Cyrus retires at nine. Let us assume that he wishes to return to New York without the knowledge of his host. Suddenly. That night. He slips out of the house and goes trudging down the road. . . . Hold! Did any one see him leave so early in the morning in Whitney's car?"

The Inspector stared. "The chauffeur, of course—man who drove him into the city. Johnson told me French left long before any one else was up. But the chauffeur!"

Ellery chuckled. "Better and better," he said. "Chauffeurs can be hushed. It has been done. . . . Our worthy anti-vicious magnate, then, slips out of the house; perhaps his accomplice, the chauffeur, even drives him down to the

station secretly. There's a train about that hour. I know, because I took one three weeks ago Monday night when I returned from Boomer's. And it's only a half-hour or so into Penn Station. In time to slip through the freight-door. . . ."

"But he'd have to stay all night!" groaned the Inspector.

"Granted. But then there's a sagacious chauffeur to alibi one. . . . You see how simple it is?"

"Oh, tosh!" exploded the Inspector.

"I didn't say it wasn't," said Ellery, eyes twinkling. "But it's something to bear in mind."

"Fairy-tales!" growled the Inspector, and then they laughed together. "I've arranged to get those alibis, by the way. I called Zorn from the office and told him to come down here. I want to see how his story checks up with Marion French's. And what he did after ten last night."

Ellery lost his bantering air. He looked dissatisfied, rubbed his forehead wearily. "It might be wise," he said, "to get all those alibis clear, at that. Mightn't be a bad idea to get Mrs. Zorn down here, too. And I'll emulate the Stoics meanwhile."

The Inspector made a number of telephone calls, while Djuna went rapidly through telephone directories, and Ellery slumped into an easy-chair and closed his eyes. . . .

A half-hour later Mr. and Mrs. Zorn sat in the Queen living-room side by side, facing Inspector Queen. Ellery was far off in a corner, almost hidden by a jutting book-case.

Mrs. Zorn was a large-boned woman, well fleshed and rosy. Her too-golden hair was cut in a severe, startling bob. She had cold green eyes and a large mouth. She looked, at first glance, under thirty; on closer observation, faint crinkles around her chin and eyes added ten years

to her appearance. She was dressed in the height of fashion and carried herself with an air of arrogance.

Despite Marion's story, Mr. and Mrs. Zorn seemed on the most amicable of terms. Mrs. Zorn acknowledged her husband's introduction of the Inspector with regal graciousness; she punctuated each remark to Zorn with a sweet "My dear. . . ."

The Inspector examined her shrewdly with his eyes, and decided not to mince words.

He turned first to Zorn. "I have called you, as a logical step in this inquiry, to explain your movements on the night of Monday past, Mr. Zorn."

The director's hand strayed to his bald pate. "Monday night? The night—of the murder, Inspector?"

"Exactly."

"Are you insinuating—" Rage leaped into his eyes behind their heavy gold-rimmed spectacles. Mrs. Zorn made the least gesture with a finger. Zorn calmed magically. "I had dinner," he said, as if nothing had happened, "at our apartment with Mrs. Zorn. We stayed in all evening. At ten o'clock or so I left the apartment and went directly to the Penny Club on Fifth Avenue and 32nd Street. I met Gray there and we discussed the Whitney merger for a half-hour or so. I developed a headache and told Gray I thought I'd try to walk it off. We said good-night and I left the Club. I did take a long walk up the Avenue and, in fact, walked all the way home to 74th Street."

"And what time was that, Mr. Zorn?" asked the Inspector.

"I should say about a quarter to twelve."

"Was Mrs. Zorn up—did she see you?"

The large rosy woman chose to reply for her husband. "No, Inspector, no indeed! I had dismissed the servants for the night a little after Mr. Zorn left the apartment, and I'd gone to bed myself. I fell asleep almost im-

mediately, and didn't hear him come in." She smiled, exhibiting huge white teeth.

"I'm afraid I don't quite understand how—" began the Inspector courteously.

"Mr. Zorn and I have separate sleeping apartments, Inspector Queen," she said, dimpling.

"Umm." The Inspector turned once more to Zorn, who had sat perfectly still during this colloquy. "Did you meet any one you knew during your walk, Mr. Zorn?"

"Why—no."

"When you entered your apartment house, did any of the house personnel see you?"

Zorn fumbled with his massive red mustache. "I'm afraid not. There's only a night-man at the switchboard after eleven, and when I came in he was absent from his post."

"The elevator, I suppose, is of the self-service type?" asked Queen dryly.

"Yes—that's correct."

The Inspector turned to Mrs. Zorn. "At what time did you see your husband in the morning—Tuesday morning?"

She raised her blond brows archly. "Tuesday morning—let me see. . . . Oh, yes! It was ten o'clock."

"Fully dressed, Mrs. Zorn?"

"Yes. He was reading his morning paper when I came into our living-room."

The Inspector smiled, quite wearily, and rose to take a short turn about the room. Finally he stopped before Zorn and fixed him with a stern eye. "Why haven't you told me about Miss French's visit to your apartment Monday evening?"

Zorn grew very still. The effect of Marion's name on Mrs. Zorn was startling. The color drained from her face and her pupils dilated tigerishly. It was she who spoke.

"That ——!" she said in a low passionate voice. But her body was tense with anger. The mask of politeness fell from her face and revealed an older woman—shrewish, cruel.

The Inspector seemed not to hear. "Mr. Zorn?" he said.

Zorn moistened his lips with a nervous tongue. "That's true—true enough. I didn't see that it had anything to do. . . . Yes, Miss French visited us. She left about ten o'clock."

The Inspector made an impatient movement. "You talked about your relations with Mrs. French, Mr. Zorn?" he asked.

"Yes, yes. That's it." The words tumbled out, gratefully.

"Mrs. Zorn flew into a rage?"

The woman's eyes darted cold green fire. Zorn mumbled, "Yes."

"Mrs. Zorn." The eyes became veiled. "You went to bed shortly after ten Monday night and did not leave your chamber until ten o'clock the following morning?"

"Right, Inspector Queen."

"In that case," concluded the Inspector, "there is nothing more to be said—now."

When the Zorns had departed, the Inspector saw that Ellery was sitting in his forgotten corner laughing silently to himself.

"I fail to see the joke," said the old man ruefully.

"Oh, dad—the mess and mire of it!" cried Ellery. "*La vie c'est confusée!* How beautifully events belie each other. . . . What do you make of your late interview?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," growled the Inspector, "but I know one thing. *Any one* who can't be accounted for by the visual evidence of witnesses between eleven-thirty o'clock Monday night and a little

after nine on Tuesday morning might have done this job. Let's take a hypothetical case. Suppose X is a possibility as the murderer. X is not seen after eleven-thirty Monday night. He says he went home and went to sleep. There is no witness. Suppose he didn't go home. Suppose he slipped into the French store through that freight entrance. And got out the next morning at nine. Returned home, sneaked into his apartment without any one seeing him, and then reappeared about ten-thirty or so, letting lots of people see him. The presumption is that he slept home all night and therefore couldn't have committed the crime. Yet physically it was possible. . . ."

"Too true, too true," murmured Ellery. "Well, evoke the next victim."

"He should be here any moment now," said the Inspector, and went into the bathroom to bathe his perspiring face.

32

ALIBIS: MARCHBANKS

Marchbanks glowered. He bore himself with the sullenness of a man who nurses a grudge. He snapped at the Inspector and ignored Ellery. He deposited his stick and hat on the table with a bang, rudely refusing to allow Djuna to take them from him. He sat down uninvited and drummed nastily on the arm of the chair.

"Well, sir," thought the Inspector, "we'll have at *you*." He took a pinch of snuff with deliberation, regarding Marchbanks curiously. "Marchbanks," he said in curt tones, "where were you Monday evening and night?"

The dead woman's brother scowled. "What's this—a third degree?"

"If you choose to make it so," retorted the Inspector, in his most unpleasant voice. "I repeat—where were you Monday night?"

"If you must know," said Marchbanks biting, "I was out on Long Island."

"Oh, Long Island!" The Inspector seemed duly impressed. "When did you go, where did you go, and how long did you stay?"

"You people always insist on a 'story,'" wheezed Marchbanks, setting his feet solidly on the rug. "Very well. I left town at about seven o'clock Monday evening. In my car. . . ."

"You drove yourself?"

"Yes. I—"

"Anybody with you?"

"NO!" shouted Marchbanks. "Do you want my story or don't you? I—"

"Continue," said the Inspector judicially.

Marchbanks glared. "As I began to say—I left town Monday evening at seven in my car. I was bound for Little Neck—"

"Little Neck, eh?" interpolated the Inspector exasperatingly.

"Yes, Little Neck," stormed Marchbanks. "What's wrong in that? I had been invited to a small party at the house of a friend of mine there—"

"His name?"

"Patrick Malone," replied Marchbanks resignedly. "When I got there, I found no one at home except Malone's man. He explained that at the last moment Malone had been called away on business and had had to call off the party. . . ."

"Did you know that such an eventuality might occur?"

"If you mean did I know that Malone was going to be called away—yes, in a way. He'd mentioned the possibility of it over the 'phone to me earlier in the day. At any rate, I saw no use in staying, so I left at once and proceeded off the main road to my own shack, a few miles

farther on. I keep it for occasional jaunts into the Island. I—”

“Have you any servants there?”

“No. It’s a small place and I prefer solitude when I’m out that way. So I slept there overnight and returned to the City in the morning by car.”

The Inspector smiled sardonically. “I suppose you met no one all night or in the morning who might verify your statements?”

“I don’t know what you mean. What are you driving at—?”

“Yes or no?”

“. . . No.”

“What time did you get to the City?”

“About ten-thirty. I rose rather late.”

“And what time was it Monday evening when you reached your friend Malone’s place and spoke to his valet?”

“Oh, I should say about eight or eight-thirty. I don’t recall exactly.”

The Inspector sent a mutely humorous glance across the room to Ellery. Then he shrugged his shoulders. Marchbanks’ florid face darkened and he rose abruptly.

“If you have nothing more to ask me, Inspector Queen, I must be going.” He picked up his hat and stick.

“Ah! Just one other thing. Sit down, Marchbanks.” Marchbanks reluctantly reseated himself. “How do you account for the murder of your sister?”

Marchbanks sniggered. “I thought you’d ask that. Up a tree, eh? Well, I’m not surprised. The police of this city are—”

“Answer my question, please.”

“I don’t account for it, and I can’t account for it!” cried Marchbanks suddenly. “That’s your business! All I know is that my sister has been shot to death, and I

want her murderer sizzling in the Chair." He stopped, out of breath.

"Yes, yes, I realize your natural desire for revenge," said the Inspector tiredly. "You may go, Mr. Marchbanks, but keep in town."

33

ALIBIS: CARMODY

Vincent Carmody was the next caller. His reticence was as marked as usual. He folded his astonishing length and sat down quite noiselessly in the inquisitorial chair. And sat waiting.

"Ah—Mr. Carmody," began the Inspector uneasily. The antique-dealer disdained to reply to what was obviously a question of fact. "Ah—Mr. Carmody, I've called you in for a little consultation. We are checking up on the movements of everybody connected directly or indirectly with Mrs. French. Purely as a matter of form, you understand. . . ."

"Ummm," said Carmody, his fingers in his straggly beard.

The Inspector dipped hastily into his old brown snuff-box. "Now, I should be happy, sir, to hear an account of your movements on Monday night—the night of the murder."

"The murder." Carmody said it negligently. "Not interested in that, Inspector. What about my daughter?"

The Inspector stared with growing irritation at Carmody's expressionless lean face. "Your daughter's search is being conducted by the proper authorities. We haven't found her yet, but we have new information which is likely to produce results. Please answer my question."

"Results!" Carmody said it with surprising bitterness. "I know what that word means in the police vocabulary.

You're stumped and you know it. I'll put my own detective on the case."

"Will you *please* answer my question?" grated the Inspector.

"Keep cool," said Carmody. "Don't see what my movements on Monday night have to do with the case. I certainly didn't kidnap my own daughter. But if you must have it, here it is.

"Late Monday I received a telegram from one of my scouts. He reported the discovery of practically a house full of early American pieces in the wilds of Connecticut. I invariably investigate finds of that nature personally. I took the train at Grand Central—the 9:14. Changed at Stamford and didn't get to my destination until nearly midnight. It's far off the beaten path. Had the address and immediately called on the people who owned the furniture. Nobody home, and I still don't know what went wrong. Had no place to stay—no hotel there—and had to return to the city. Couldn't make a decent connection and didn't get back to my apartment until four in the morning. That's all."

"Not quite, Mr. Carmody." The Inspector mused. "Did any one see you when you returned to the city—at your apartment, perhaps?"

"No. It was too late. Nobody up. And I live alone. I had my breakfast at the apartment dining-room at ten o'clock. The head-waiter will identify me."

"No doubt," said the Inspector disagreeably. "Meet any one on your trip who might remember you?"

"No. Unless the conductor of the train."

"Well!" Queen slammed his hands behind his back and regarded Carmody with open distaste. "Please make a note of all your movements and mail it to me at Headquarters. One question more. Do you know that your daughter Bernice is a drug addict?"

Carmody leaped out of his chair snarling. In an instant he had been transformed from bored reticence to contorted fury. Ellery half-rose from his chair in the corner; it appeared for a moment as if the antique-dealer might strike the Inspector. But the old man stood very still, examining Carmody coolly. Carmody, fists clenched, subsided in his chair.

"How did you find that out?" he muttered in a strangled voice. The muscles rippled under the skin of his dark triangular jaw. "I didn't think any one knew—except Winifred and me."

"Ah, so Mrs. French knew it too?" queried the Inspector instantly. "Had she known it long?"

"So it's out," growled Carmody. "Good God!" He raised a haggard face to Queen. "I've known it for about a year. Winifred—" his face hardened—"Winifred didn't know it at all. Eyes of the mother, and all that," he added bitterly. "Rot! She thought chiefly of herself. . . . So I told her—two weeks ago. She didn't believe it. We quarreled. But at the end she knew—I saw it in her eyes. I had talked to Bernice countless times about it. She was shameless. She would not divulge the source of her drug supply. In desperation I turned to Winifred. I thought Winifred might succeed where I had failed. I don't know any more . . ." His voice dropped to a whisper. "I was going to take Bernice away—somewhere—anywhere—cure her. . . . And then Winifred was murdered and Bernice—gone. . . ." His voice died away. Huge welts stood out under his eyes. The man was suffering—how deeply, by what perverse psychology only Ellery, sitting quietly in his corner, realized.

And then, without another sound, without so much as a word of explanation, Carmody sprang to his feet, snatched his hat, and dashed from the Queen apartment. The Inspector, at the window, saw him running wildly down the street, hat still clutched in his hand.

ALIBIS: TRASK

Trask was a half-hour late for his appointment at the Queen apartment. He appeared indolently, indolently greeted the two Queens, indolently sank into the chair, indolently applied a match to his cigarette, which was stuck rakishly in a long jade holder, and indolently awaited the Inspector's questions.

Where was he Monday night? Oh, about town—vaguely, with an idle gesture of his arm. He tweaked the points of his mustache.

Where "about town"? Well, really—can't remember. Some night-club or other at first.

At what time? Must have started about eleven-thirty.

Where was he before eleven-thirty? Oh, he'd been disappointed by some friends, and had dropped into a Broadway theater at the last moment.

What was the name of the night-club? Really, don't recall it.

What did he mean by "not recalling it"? Well—to tell the truth, he had some bootleg liquor and it must have contained dynamite—ha, ha! Put him out like a light. Got awfully drunk. Didn't remember anything except dashing cold water on his face at ten o'clock Tuesday morning in the lavatory of the Pennsylvania Station. All mussed up, too. Must have had an awful night of it. Probably kicked out of the night-club in the morning. And all that. Just had time to dash home and get into some fresh clothes. Then the directors' meeting at the French store.

"Beautiful!" muttered the Inspector, eying Trask as if he were an obnoxious little animal. Trask flicked the ashes from his cigarette in the general direction of a tray.

"Trask!" The whip in Queen's voice brought the tall,

dissipated director's body up with a start. "Are you sure you can't remember what night-club you were in?"

"I say now," drawled Trask, sinking back, "you scared me that time, Inspector. I've told you no. Went completely out of my head. Don't recall a thing."

"Well, that's just too bad," grunted the Inspector. "If I'm not disturbing you, Trask—do you know that Bernice Carmody was a habitual drug-user?"

"Not really!" Trask sat up straight. "Then I *was* right!"

"Oh, you suspected it?"

"A number of times. Bernice was queer quite frequently. Showed all the symptoms. I've seen plenty of 'em." He brushed a speck of ash from his gardenia with languid distaste.

The Inspector smiled. "Which didn't daunt you from going ahead with your contemplated engagement to Miss Carmody?"

Trask looked virtuous. "Oh, no—really! I'd intended to cure her after we were married. Without her family's knowledge, and all that. Too bad—too bad," he sighed. He sighed again.

"What has your relationship been with Cyrus French?" demanded the Inspector impatiently.

"Oh, that!" Trask brightened. "Absolutely of the best, Inspector. You—er—you would rather expect a chap to get along with his future father-in-law. Haw-haw!"

"Get out of here," said the Inspector distinctly.

John Gray folded his gloves neatly, deposited them in his rich black derby, and handed them with a cheerful smile to Djuna. Then he shook hands decorously with the

Inspector, nodded to Ellery with just the proper note of heartiness, and obediently seated himself at the Inspector's request.

"Well!" he chuckled, smoothing his white mustache. "Very charming household, I see. Very! And how is the investigation proceeding, Inspector? Tchh, tchh!" He chattered like a spry old parrot, his twinkling eyes never still.

The Inspector cleared his throat. "A little matter of check-up, Mr. Gray. Routine. I haven't inconvenienced you by this summons?"

"Not at all, not at all," said Gray amiably. "I've just come from a visit to Cyrus—Cyrus French, I should say—and he's much better, by the way, much better."

"That's nice," said the Inspector. "Now, Mr. Gray, just to make it legal—can you account for your movements on Monday night?"

Gray looked blank. Then he smiled slowly. Then he burst into an infectious chuckle. "I see, I see! Clever, Inspector, quite clever. You want to be sure of everything. Very interesting! I suppose every one is coming in for a similar quiz?"

"Oh, yes!" said the Inspector reassuringly. "We've had a number of your colleagues on the carpet today already." They both laughed. Gray became politely serious.

"Monday night? Let me see." He plucked his mustache thoughtfully. "Of course! Monday night I spent the entire evening at my Club. The Penny Club, you know. Had dinner there with some of my cronies, played billiards—the usual thing. At about ten o'clock, I believe, or perhaps a little after ten, Zorn—you remember Zorn, of course, one of my fellow-directors—Zorn dropped in for a chat. We discussed the coming merger, the details of which we were to work out in conference the next morning

with French and the rest, and about a half-hour later Zorn left, complaining of headache."

"Well, that tallies nicely," said Queen, with a grin. "Because Mr. Zorn was here not long ago and told us about your meeting at the Penny Club."

"Really?" Gray smiled. "Then I gather there is little left to be said, Inspector."

"Not quite, Mr. Gray." The Inspector clucked cheerfully. "You see, just to keep the record straight—how did you spend the rest of the evening?"

"Oh! In a commonplace manner, sir. I left the Club at about eleven and walked home—I live not far from there, on Madison Avenue. Simply went home and to bed."

"You live alone, Mr. Gray?"

Gray grimaced. "Unfortunately, being a misogynist, I have no family, Inspector. An old servant keeps house for me—I live in an apartment hotel, you know."

"Then your housekeeper was up when you returned from the Club, Mr. Gray?"

Gray spread his hands briefly. "No. Hilda had left on Saturday evening to visit a sick brother in Jersey City, and did not get back until Tuesday afternoon."

"I see." The Inspector took snuff. "But surely *some one* saw you get home, Mr. Gray?"

Gray looked startled, then he smiled again one of his twinkling smiles. "Oh, you want me to establish my—alibi, is it, Inspector?"

"That's what it's called, sir."

"Then there's nothing more to be said," replied Gray happily. "Because Jackson, the night-clerk, saw me when I entered the building. I asked for mail and stood chatting with him for several minutes. Then I took the elevator to my suite."

The Inspector's face brightened. "Then really," he said,

"there *is* nothing more to be said. Except—" his face lengthened momentarily—"what time was it when you stopped talking with this night-clerk and went upstairs?"

"Just eleven-forty. I remember glancing at the clock above Jackson's desk to compare it with my own watch."

"And where is your hotel, Mr. Gray?"

"Madison and 37th, Inspector. The *Burton*."

"Then I think— Unless, Ellery, you would like to ask Mr. Gray a question or two?"

The aged little director turned quickly, in open surprise. He had forgotten the presence of Ellery, who was sitting quietly in his corner listening to the conversation. Gray looked expectant as Ellery smiled.

"Thank you, dad—I *have* something to ask Mr. Gray, if we're not keeping him too long?" He looked questioningly at their visitor.

Gray expostulated. "Not at all, Mr. Queen. Anything I can do to help you—"

"Very well, then." Ellery hoisted his lean length from the chair and stretched his muscles. "Mr. Gray, I'm going to ask you a peculiar question. I rely upon your discretion to preserve silence, for one thing, and upon your undoubted loyalty to Mr. French and your concern in his bereavement to answer frankly."

"I'm entirely at your service."

"Let me present a hypothetical case," continued Ellery rapidly. "Let us suppose that Bernice Carmody was a drug addict. . . ."

Gray frowned. "A drug addict?"

"Exactly. And let us suppose further that neither her mother nor her stepfather suspected her malady and condition. Then let us suppose that Mrs. French suddenly discovered the truth. . . ."

"I see, I see," murmured Gray.

"The hypothetical question arising from this hypotheti-

cal case is: What do you think Mrs. French would do?" Ellery lit a cigaret.

Gray grew thoughtful. Then he looked into Ellery's eyes. "The first thing that occurs to me, Mr. Queen," he said simply, "is that Mrs. French would *not* confide in Cyrus."

"That's interesting. You know them both so well. . . ."

"Yes." Gray set his small wrinkled jaw. "Cyrus has been a lifelong friend. I know—or knew—Mrs. French perhaps as well as any one acquainted with the French family. And I am certain, familiar as I am with Cyrus's character and Mrs. French's knowledge of his character, that she would not dare to tell him such a thing. She would keep it strictly to herself. She might possibly inform Carmody, her first husband. . . ."

"We needn't go into that, Mr. Gray," said Ellery. "But why would she keep it a secret from French?"

"Because," said Gray frankly, "Cyrus is hypersensitive on the subject of vice, particularly drug addiction. You must remember that most of his latter years have been devoted to wiping out as much of this sort of vice in the City as possible. To find it in his own family would, I firmly believe, unbalance him. . . . But, of course," he added quickly, "he doesn't know; I'm positive Mrs. French would keep a thing like that to herself. She might try to cure the girl secretly, perhaps. . . ."

Ellery said clearly: "One of the major reasons for Mrs. French's silence in a case like this would be, I suppose, that she was aiming to secure for her daughter a generous slice of her husband's fortune?"

Gray started uncomfortably. "Well . . . I don't . . . Yes, if you must have the truth, I think that is so. Mrs. French was a calculating—not necessarily unscrupulous, mind you—but a calculating and very practical woman. I believe that, motherlike, she was determined that Bernice

come in for a good share of Cyrus's estate when Cyrus should pass on. . . . Is there anything else, Mr. Queen?"

"That is," said Ellery, smiling, "quite sufficient. Thank you immeasurably, Mr. Gray."

"Then," said the Inspector, "that will be all."

Gray looked relieved, accepted his coat, hat and gloves from Djuna, murmured polite adieux, and left.

The Inspector and Ellery heard his light quick step on the staircase as he descended to the street.

36

"THE TIME HAS COME . . ."

The Queens had dinner in silence. Djuna served in silence, and in silence cleared the table afterward. The Inspector dipped into the browned interior of his snuff-box and Ellery held communion with first a cigaret, then a pipe, then a cigaret again. In all this time no word was spoken. It was a silence of sympathy, not infrequent in the Queen household.

Finally Ellery sighed and stared into the fireplace. But it was the Inspector who spoke first.

"As far as I am concerned," he said with a grim disappointment, "this day has been entirely wasted."

Ellery raised his eyebrows. "Dad, dad, you grow more irascible with every passing day. . . . If I didn't know how upset and overworked you've been of late, I'd be annoyed with you."

"At my obtuseness?" demanded the Inspector, twinkling.

"No, at the lapse of your usual mental vigor." Ellery twisted his head and grinned at his father. "Do you mean to say that today's incidents have meant nothing to you?"

"The raid flat, Springer skipped, nothing tangible from the alibis of these people—I can't see any cause for celebration," retorted the Inspector.

"Well, well!" Ellery frowned. "Perhaps I'm over-sanguine. . . . But the whole thing is so clear!"

He sprang to his feet and began to rummage in his desk. He produced his voluminous sheets of notes and thumbed rapidly through them under the Inspector's wearied and bewildered eyes. Then he slapped them back into their receptacle.

"It's all over," he announced, "all over but the shouting and—the proof. I have all the threads—or rather, all the threads which lead inexorably to the murderer of Mrs. French. They don't make solid proof, such as is demanded by our venerable courts of law and our prosecuting system. What would you do in a case like that, dad?"

The Inspector wrinkled his nose in self-disgust. "I take it that what's been a hopeless maze to me has been a clear thoroughfare to you. That rankles, son! I have raised up a Frankenstein to haunt my old age. . . ." Then he chuckled and laid a slightly infirm hand on Ellery's knee.

"Good lad," he said. "I don't know *what* I'd do without you."

"Shucks." Ellery blushed. "You've gone sentimental, too, dad. . . ." Their fingers met covertly. "Now, look here, Inspector! You've got to help me to a decision!"

"Yes, yes. . . ." Queen dropped back, embarrassed. "You've got a case, an explanation and no proof. What to do. . . . Bluff, my son. Bluff as if you'd raised the pot before the draw on a pair of fours and then found real opposition staring at you. Raise again!"

Ellery looked thoughtful. "I've been tottering on the edge . . . Christmas!" His eyes brightened with a sudden thought. "How stupid I've been!" he cried at once. "I've a beautiful card up my sleeve and I've forgotten all about it! Bluff? We'll just about sweep our slippery friend off our slippery friend's feet!"

He yanked the telephone toward him, hesitated, then

turned it over to the Inspector, who was regarding him with gloomy fondness.

"Here's a list," he said, scribbling on a piece of paper, "of some people of importance. Will you blow the conch, dad, while I begin a memorization of these pesky notes?"

"The time is—" asked the Inspector submissively.

"To-morrow morning at nine-thirty," replied Ellery. "And you might call the D.A. and tell him to close in on our friend Springer."

"Springer!" cried the Inspector.

"Springer," replied Ellery. And thereafter there was silence, broken periodically by the voice of the Inspector on the telephone.

PARENTHESIS AND CHALLENGE

I have often found it a stimulating exercise in my own reading of murder fiction to pause at that point in the story immediately preceding the solution, and to try by a logical analysis to determine for myself the identity of the criminal. . . . Because I believe that numerous gourmets of this species of fictional delicacy are as interested in the reasoning as in the reading, I submit in the proper spirit of sportsmanship an amiable challenge to the reader. . . . Without reading the concluding pages, Reader—Who killed Mrs. French? . . . There is a great tendency among detective-story lovers to endeavor to "guess" the criminal by submitting to the play of a blind instinct. A certain amount of this is inevitable, I will admit. but the application of logic and common sense is the important thing, the source of the greater enjoyment. . . . Whereupon I state without reservation that the reader is at this stage in the recounting of *The French Powder Mystery* fully cognizant of all the facts pertinent to the discovery of the criminal; and that a sufficiently diligent study of what has gone before should educe a clear understanding of what is to come. *A rivederci!*

E. Q.

THE LAST EPISODE

"Forty years in the service of the SÛRETÉ—one might hazard, would dull the edge of one's zest for the hunt. Thank the good Lord, this is not so! at least in my own case, which has been as full of interest, I dare say, as the next. . . . There was the admirable Henri Tencqueville, who cut his throat before my very eyes when we cornered him in his Montmartre hideaway . . . and Petit Charlot, who shot two of my faithful lads to death and bit off a piece of the good Sergeant Mousson's nose in the mêlée before he was subdued. . . . Ah, well! I grow tender in reminiscence, but . . . I would make the point that even to-day, old and enfeebled as I am, I would not give up the thrill of that final coup de main, that last stage of the chase when the quarry, panting and desperate, has his back to the wall—no, not for all the everlasting delights of the Turkish heaven! . . ."

—From THE MEMOIRS OF A PREFECT,
By Auguste Brillonn.

MAKE READY!

THEY came in one by one—furtive, curious, impassive, bored, reluctant, openly nervous. Quietly they came in, conscious of the tight police cordon, of a quivering strain in the atmosphere, of shrewd eyes that noted and calculated their least movement—conscious most of all of grim overhanging disaster, to whom and with what dire effects they did not know and could only guess.

It was nine-thirty of the fateful Thursday morning. The door through which they shuffled in silence was the door marked PRIVATE: CYRUS FRENCH. . . . They passed inside through the bare lofty anteroom, into the heavy quiet of the library, sat down in incredible camp-chairs set up martially facing the dormer-windows.

They crowded the room. In the front row sat old Cyrus French himself, a white and trembling figure. His fingers were desperately entwined in the fingers of Marion French by his side. Westley Weaver, harried face gaunted by sleeplessness, occupied the seat next to Marion's. To French's left was Dr. Stuart, the old man's physician, watching his patient with a professional pantherishness. By Stuart's side sat John Gray, dapper and birdlike, occasionally leaning over the doctor's bulky abdomen to talk into the sick man's ear.

In the row behind were Hortense Underhill, the house-keeper, and Doris Keaton, the maid. Both sat rigidly, whispering to each other out of the corners of their mouths, peering about with frightened eyes.

In serried ranks. . . . Wheezing Marchbanks; the portly Zorn fingering his watch-chain; a befurred and aro-

matic Mrs. Zorn dispensing smiles to the grave Frenchman, Paul Lavery, who stroked his short beard; Trask, a flower in his lapel, but utterly pale, with enormous leaden rings under his eyes; the antique-dealer Vincent Carmody, a saturnine figure, uncompromising, somber, even in his chair towering above the heads of the company; mild-mannered Arnold MacKenzie, the general manager of the store; Diana Johnson, the Negress who had discovered Mrs. French's dead body; the four watchmen—O'Flaherty, Bloom, Ralska, Powers. . . .

There was little conversation. Each time the anteroom door opened people twisted about in their seats, craned, jerked their eyes back to the window again with guilty side-glances toward each other.

The conference-table had been pushed against the wall. In a row of chairs before the table sat Sergeant Thomas Velie and William Crouther, chief of the store's detective force, talking in undertones; scowling Salvatore Fiorelli, of the Narcotic Squad, bright black eyes snapping at some inexpressible thought, his scar pulsing slowly beneath the swarthy skin; "Jimmy," the little bald-headed operative of the Headquarters fingerprint department. At the anteroom door stood Patrolman Bush, relegated to the important post of guardian of the door. A cloud of detectives, among them Inspector Queen's favorite operatives—Hagstrom, Flint, Ritter, Johnson, and Piggott—massed along the wall directly opposite the conference-table. At each corner of the room stood a silent officer in blue, cap in hand.

Neither Inspector Queen nor Ellery Queen had yet put in his appearance. People whispered this information to each other. They looked sidelong at the anteroom door, against which Bush's broad back was set.

Gradually, tangibly, another silence came over the scene. Whispers trembled, wavered, ceased. Glances became more

furtive, chair-twistings more frequent. Cyrus French coughed violently; he doubled up in agony. Dr. Stuart's eyes flickered with a vague anxiety. Weaver bent far to the side when the old man's paroxysm had passed; Marion looked startled; soon their heads were close together, touching. . . .

Crouther scraped his hand over his face. "What the hell is holdin' up the works, Sergeant?" Velie shook his head gloomily. "What's it all about?"

"Got me."

Crouther shrugged.

The silence thickened. Every one grew still as stone. . . . The silence grew more embarrassing with each passing moment—a silence that swelled, breathed, became alive. . . .

Then Sergeant Velie did a strange thing. His spatulate forefinger, resting on his knee, tapped three distinct times, in rhythm. Not even Crouther caught the signal, and Crouther was at Velie's side. But the officer on guard, who had been watching the Sergeant's hand for minutes, immediately sprang into motion. All eyes flashed instantly upon him, grasping at this sign of life, of happening with a pitiful eagerness. . . . The policeman went to the desk, which was shrouded by a light tarpaulin, and bending far over carefully removed the covering. He stepped back, folded the tarpaulin neatly, retreated to his corner. . . .

But he was already forgotten. As if the sheer rays of a searchlight had been trained upon the desk, every one in the room eyed the objects revealed with a fascination drawn from the deepest crevices of his being.

They were many, and heterogeneous. Ranged in orderly rows along the glass top, each with a small labeled card before it, were the gold lipstick marked W.M.F., which Ellery had found on the bedroom dressing-table; the silver-chased lipstick with the C monogram from the dead

woman's bag in the exhibition-window; six keys with gold discs—the keys to the apartment, five of which bore the initials of Cyrus French, Winifred Marchbanks French, Marion French, Bernice Carmody, Westley Weaver, and the sixth the word Master; the two carved onyx book-ends, lying with a small jar of white powder and a camel's-hair brush between them; the five strange volumes which Ellery had found on French's desk; the shaving-set from the lavatory cabinet; two ashtrays filled with cigaret stubs—one set much shorter in length than the other; the gauzy scarf initialed M.F., taken from the neck of the victim; a board on which were tacked the cards from the cardroom table, laid out exactly as they had first appeared to the police; the slip of blue memorandum paper which was checked off at Cyrus French's typewritten name; the blue hat and the walking shoes from the bedroom closet which Hortense Underhill and Doris Keaton had identified as having been worn by Bernice Carmody the day she disappeared; and a black .38 Colt revolver, with the two now rusty-looking splatters of metal which had been the lethal bullets lying near the muzzle.

Quite by itself, prominently in view of the audience, lay a pair of dull, steely manacles—a symbol and a portent of what was to come. . . .

And there they reposed, the silent clues garnered during the investigation frankly open to the gaze of the uneasy guests of Ellery Queen. Again they stared, whispered.

But this time they had not long to wait. A slight commotion in the corridor outside became plainly audible in the library. Sergeant Velie lumbered to his feet and went quickly to the anteroom door, motioning Patrolman Bush aside. He disappeared, the door swinging shut behind him.

Now the door became the focal point of those half-angry, bewildered eyes—that door behind which the deep murmur of several voices kept up a short mysterious litany.

. . . And as if it had been cut cleanly by a knife, the voices broke off and an instant of silence fell before the knob of the door was rattled, the door was pushed inward, and eight men stepped into the room.

38

THE END OF ALL THINGS

It had been Ellery Queen's hand on the knob—a subtly changed young man with drawn features and a sharpened glance that swept the room once and then returned to the anteroom.

"Before me, Commissioner," he murmured, holding the door wide. Commissioner Scott Welles grunted, pushed his heavy body into view. Three tight-lipped men in plain clothes—his bodyguard—flanked him as he crossed the room toward the desk.

Next to appear in full sight of the assembled company was a strangely altered Inspector Richard Queen, holding himself rigidly erect. He was pale. He followed the police commissioner in silence.

After Queen came District Attorney Henry Sampson and his assistant, the red-haired Timothy Cronin. They were whispering to each other, paying no attention to the occupants of the room.

Velie, making up the rear, carefully closed the anteroom door, flipped Bush back to his post with a curt finger, and dropped into his chair beside Crouther. The store detective looked up at him inquiringly; Velie said nothing and settled his big body. Both men turned to watch the newcomers.

There was a little flurry of conversation as Ellery Queen and his companions stood near the desk at the head of the room. Inspector Queen indicated one of the leather-padded conference chairs immediately to the right and a little behind the desk, as the seat to be occupied by the Commis-

sioner. Welles seemed a sadder and wiser man—he sat down without a word, his eyes on Ellery's quiet figure before the desk.

The three guards disposed themselves with the other detectives at the side of the room.

Inspector Queen himself sat down in a big chair to the left of the desk, with Cronin at his side. The District Attorney dropped into a chair next to the Commissioner. Desk in the center, its varied articles beckoning attention. On either side two chairs with official occupants. And dominating the scene . . .

The stage was set.

Ellery Queen, cynically examining the room and its occupants once more, expressed himself as satisfied at the Commissioner's brusque question. Ellery stepped behind the desk and stood with his back to the dormer-windows. His head was lowered, his eyes on the desk-top. His hand strayed to the glass, hovered over the book-ends, played with the jar of white powder. . . . He smiled, straightened, raised his head, removed his pince-nez glasses, looked calmly at his hushed audience, waited. . . . Not until there was absolute silence did he speak.

"Ladies and gentleman." Prosy beginning! Yet something vaguely eerie shivered through the air; it was a simultaneous sigh from many breasts.

"Ladies and gentlemen. Sixty hours ago Mrs. Winifred French was shot to death in this building. Forty-eight hours ago her body was found. This morning we have assembled at a private Waterloo to name her murderer." Ellery had spoken quietly; now he paused for the slightest instant. . . .

But after that sigh *en masse* even breaths seemed to be drawn with care. No one spoke; no one whispered. They merely sat and waited.

A cutting edge slipped into the tone of Ellery's voice.

"Very well! A few preliminary explanations are required. Commissioner Welles—" he turned slightly toward Welles, "it is with your permission that I conduct this unofficial inquest?"

Welles nodded, once.

"Then let me explain," continued Ellery, turning back to his auditors, "that I am merely taking the place of Inspector Queen, who is unable to take charge because of a minor throat ailment which makes long speaking difficult and painful. Correct, sir?" He bowed very solemnly in the direction of his father. The Inspector grew even paler than before, nodded wordlessly. "Further," Ellery went on, "if I shall at any time use the personal 'I' in my discourse this morning, you are to understand that it is merely for convenience—that in reality I shall be describing the investigatory processes of Inspector Queen himself."

He halted abruptly, threw a challenging glance about the room, met nothing but wide eyes and ears, and plunged at once into an analysis of the French murder case.

"I shall take you through our investigation of this crime, ladies and gentlemen," he began in a sharp decisive tone, "step by step, deduction by deduction, observation by observation, until I arrive at what is an inevitable conclusion. Hagstrom, you are taking this down?"

Eyes followed the direction of Ellery's glance. At the side of the room where the detectives were congregated, Detective Hagstrom was seated, pencil poised above a stenographic notebook. Hagstrom bobbed his head.

"What transpires here this morning," explained Ellery pleasantly, "will become part of the official dossier of the case. Enough of asides!" He cleared his throat.

"Mrs. Winifred Marchbanks French was discovered dead—killed by two bullets, one in the heart and one in the *precordial* region below the heart—on Tuesday at fifteen minutes or so past noon. When Inspector Queen arrived

upon the scene he noted several facts which led him to believe that"—he paused—"the exhibition-window on the main floor was *not* in effect the place where the crime was committed."

The room was deathly still. Fascination, fear, aversion, grief—the gamut of emotions played upon those intent white faces. Ellery Queen went on, rapidly.

"There were five component elements in this initial investigation," he said, "that pointed to the conclusion that the murder was not committed in the window.

"The first was the fact that, while on Monday night Mrs. French had in her possession her personal key to this apartment, the key was missing from her person and effects Tuesday morning, on the discovery of her dead body. O'Flaherty, the head nightwatchman, testified that she had the key at eleven-fifty Monday night when she left his cubbyhole to take the elevator upstairs. Yet it was gone. Search of the store and premises left the key still unfound. What was the inference? That the key and the crime were in some way connected. How? Well, the key appertained to the apartment. If it was missing, wasn't there an indication that the apartment also entered into the crime somewhere? At least there was enough suspicion to be gleaned from the missing key to warrant a belief that the apartment *might have been* the scene of the crime."

Ellery paused; his lips twitched with fleeting amusement at the frowning faces before him.

"Captious reasoning? I see the disbelief on your faces. Yet bear it in mind. The fact of the key's being missing meant nothing of itself—but when it was added to the four other facts of which I shall speak, it took on significance indeed."

He swung back into his main narrative.

"The second element was a grotesque and even amusing one—you will see, incidentally, that the detection of crime

is not built upon weighty salient factors, but upon just such incongruities as I shall have occasion to mention this morning. . . . I refer to the fact that the crime must have been committed a short time after midnight. This was simply calculated from Dr. Prouty's report—Dr. Prouty is the Assistant Medical Examiner—that Mrs. French had been dead some twelve hours when she was found.

"If Mrs. French had been shot to death in the window-room at a little past midnight, ladies and gentlemen," continued Ellery, with a twinkle in his eye, "her murderer must have committed his crime either in total darkness or by the feeble illumination of a pocket-torch! For there were no lighting fixtures that worked in the room—in fact, no bulbs—and the room was not even wired. Yet we were forced to suppose that the murderer met his victim, talked with her, perhaps quarreled with her, then shot her unerringly in two vital spots, disposed of her body in the wall-bed, cleaned up the blood-stains and what not—all in a room at best illuminated by a flashlight! No, it was not reasonable. Wherefore Inspector Queen, quite logically, I believe, concluded that the crime was not committed in the exhibition-window."

There was a little rustle of excitement. Ellery smiled, continued.

"This, however, was not the only reason for his belief. There was a third point. And that was the lipstick—the long, silver-chased lipstick—monogrammed C, found in Mrs. French's handbag by her body. That this lipstick obviously was not Mrs. French's I shall not discuss at this point. The pertinent factor was that it contained lip-rouge of a decidedly darker shade of red than the lip-rouge on the dead woman's lips. But this meant that Mrs. French's own lipstick—with which she daubed the lighter rouge on her lips—should be somewhere about. But it was

not! Where could it be? Perhaps the murderer took it? That sounded rather nonsensical. The most plausible explanation seemed to be that the missing lipstick was somewhere else in the building. . . . Why somewhere else in the building?—why not at Mrs. French's home, or at least outside the store?

"For this very good reason. That Mrs. French's lips—her dead mute lips—which were painted with the lighter shade of red, indicated that she had not completed her application of the rouge! There were two dabs on either side of her upper lip, and another small dab in the center of her lower lip. The rouge had not been smeared—it had patently been applied with a finger and left that way. . . ." Ellery turned toward Marion French. He said gently, "How do you apply your lip-rouge, Miss French?"

The girl whispered: "Just as you described, Mr. Queen. Three pats, one on each side of the upper lip and one in the center of the lower lip."

"Thank you." Ellery smiled. "We had, then, visible evidence of a case where a woman began to paint her lips and did not complete the operation. But this was unnatural, remarkable. There are very few things that will keep a woman from finishing this delicate task. Very, very few! One of them might be a violent interruption of some kind. A violent interruption? But there was murder committed! Was that the interruption?"

He changed his tone, forged ahead. "It seemed likely. But in any case, those lips had not been painted in the window-room. Where was the lipstick? That we found it later in the apartment was merely confirmation. . . .

"Point number four was physiological. Dr. Prouty was puzzled by the fact that there was so little blood on the corpse. Both wounds—one particularly—should have bled considerably. The *precordial* region contains many blood-vessels and muscles which would have been badly torn by

the passage of the bullet, which left a ragged wound. Where was the blood? Had the murderer cleaned it up? But in the dark, or semi-darkness, he could not possibly have removed all traces of the copious blood-flow from those wounds. Whereupon we were compelled once more to conclude that that blood had flowed—*somewhere else*. Which meant that Mrs. French had been shot somewhere else than in the window-room.

"And the fifth point was a psychological one which I fear"—he smiled sadly—"would not carry much weight in a court of law. Nevertheless to me it was quite overwhelming in its indication. For the mind rebelled at the thought that the window-room was the scene of the crime. It was preposterous, dangerous, asinine from the point of view of a potential murderer. A meeting and a murder connote secrecy, privacy—any number of exact requirements. The window-room afforded none of these. The room is not fifty feet away from the head night-watchman's office. That area is well-patrolled at periodic intervals. Revolver-shots had to be fired—and none was heard. No! Both Inspector Queen and myself felt—for the five reasons I have given you, no single one of which was conclusive, but which were collectively significant—that the crime was not committed in the window-room."

Ellery paused. His audience was following the story with eager, panting concentration. Commissioner Welles regarded Ellery with a new light in his small eyes. The Inspector was sunk deeply in thought.

"If not the window," continued Ellery, "where then? The key pointed to the apartment—the required privacy, illumination, a logical place for the use of lipstick—certainly the apartment seemed the best possibility. So Inspector Queen, relying upon my discretion and discernment, since he himself could not leave the window-room where the preliminary investigation was still going on,

asked me to go to the apartment and see what I could see. Which I did, with interesting results. . . .

"The first thing I found in the apartment was Mrs. French's own lipstick, lying on the bedroom dressing-table." Ellery picked up the gold lipstick from the desk and held it up for a moment. "This lipstick proved at once, of course, that Mrs. French had been in the apartment on Monday night. The fact that it was lying under the curved edge of a mother-of-pearl tray on the dressing-table and was quite hidden, showed that it had probably been overlooked by the murderer. In fact, the murderer had no reason even to look for it, because he did not apparently observe that the lipstick in Mrs. French's bag and the coloring on her lips were not identical." Ellery replaced the glittering metal case on the desk.

"Now, I found the lipstick on the dressing-table. What did this mean? It seemed rather plain that Mrs. French had been using the stick at that dressing-table inside when she was interrupted. But the fact that the lipstick was still there on the table when I found it pointed, it seemed to me, to the fact that Mrs. French was not shot in the bedroom. What was the interruption, then? Obviously, either a knock on the outer door or the noise of the murderer entering the apartment. It was not the latter, for the murderer had no key to the apartment, as I shall soon prove. Then it must have been a knock at the door. Then, too, Mrs. French must have been expecting it, for it so disturbed her, or it was so important to her, that she immediately put down her lipstick, neglecting to complete the daubing of her lips, and hurried through the library and into the anteroom to admit her nocturnal visitor. Presumably she opened the door, the visitor entered, and they went into the library where Mrs. French stood behind the desk and the visitor stood to the right, facing her—that is, Mrs. French stood where I am standing now and the mur-

derer stood about where Detective Hagstrom is sitting at this moment.

"How do I know this?" went on Ellery rapidly. "Very simply. On examining the library, I discovered that these book-ends, which lay on the desk"—he lifted the two onyx book-ends carefully and exhibited them—"had been tampered with. The green felt sheathing of one of them was lighter in shade than its mate. Mr. Weaver volunteered the information that the book-ends were only two months old, having been presented to Mr. French by Mr. Gray on the occasion of Mr. French's last birthday, and that he had observed them at that time in perfect condition, with the felts exactly alike in color. Furthermore, the book-ends had never left the room, or in fact the desk itself. Apparently, then, the change of felt had occurred the night before. And that was proved when, on examining the felt under a powerful glass, I noted some scattered grains of a white powder stuck in the glue-line where felt and onyx met!

"The glue was still a trifle viscid," said Ellery, "showing that it had been very recently applied. The grains, on examination, by myself cursorily and on analysis by the official fingerprint expert, proved to be ordinary fingerprint powder, such as is used by the police. But the use of fingerprint powder predicated a crime. There were no fingerprints on the onyx. That meant the fingerprints had been removed. Why the powder, then? Obviously, first to sprinkle the surface in order to bring out what fingerprints might be there, and second to remove the ones found. So much was evident.

"But the larger question arose—why were these book-ends handled at all?" Ellery smiled. "It was an important question, and its answer told an important story. Well, we now knew that they were handled in order to change the felt on one of them. *But why had that felt been changed?*"

His eyes challenged them mischievously. "There was only one logical answer. *To hide or remove a trace of the crime.* But what could such a trace be—one that would necessitate carefully ripping off a whole felt, running down to some department in the store which stocks felts and baizes (with what risk you may imagine!), bringing back the felt and some glue, and finally pasting the new protector on the book-end? It must be a damaging trace indeed. The most damaging trace of a crime which I can conceive is—blood. And that was the answer.

"For Dr. Prouty had stated positively that much blood had flowed. Then I had found the exact spot where Mrs. French's heart-blood had poured out of her body! I proceeded to reconstruct that incident. The book-ends were on the far edge of the desk, opposite the place where I am now standing. The blood must have come, then, from a position similar to mine at this moment. If we suppose that Mrs. French had been shot as she stood here, the first bullet striking above the abdomen in the *precordial* region, then the blood spurted out directly on the glass top of the desk and trickled across to the book-end, soaking it in gore. Whereupon she must have collapsed in the chair, falling forward just as the second bullet, fired from the same spot, hit her directly in the heart. This also bled a little. Only one book-end was affected—the one nearer the center of the table. It was so bloody that the murderer was compelled to remove the felt altogether and substitute a new one. Why he felt compelled to hide this trace of the crime I shall go into later. As for the different shade of the new felt—it is an optical fact that colors are more difficult to distinguish truly by artificial light than by daylight. At night, no doubt, the two shades of green seemed identical. With the aid of the sun I immediately detected the difference. . . .

"You see now how we concluded exactly where Mrs.

French was when she was murdered. As for the position of her assailant, it was determined from the angle of the wounds themselves, which were pointing to the left and quite ragged, indicating that the murderer stood rather sharply to the right."

Ellery paused, patting his lips with a handkerchief. "I have strayed a little from the main line of my exposition," he said, "because it was necessary to convince you that I now had genuine proof that the murder had been committed in the apartment. Until the discovery of the tampered book-ends I could not be sure, despite the fact that I found these cards and cigaret-stubs"—he displayed them briefly—"in the cardroom next door."

He put down the board on which the cards were tacked. "We found the cards lying on the table there arranged in such a manner as to indicate immediately that a game of Russian banque had been interrupted. Mr. Weaver testified that the cardroom had been tidy the evening before, that the cards had not been there. That meant, of course, that some one had used them during the night. Mr. Weaver further attested to the fact that of all the French family and their friends and acquaintances, Mrs. French and her daughter Bernice Carmody were the only ones addicted to the game of banque—that in fact it was well known in many quarters how passionately devoted to it they were.

"The cigaret-stubs in the ashtray on the table bore the brand-name *La Duchesse*—again identified by Mr. Weaver as Miss Carmody's brand. It was scented with her favorite *odeur*, violet.

"It seemed, then, that Mrs. French and Miss Carmody had both been in the apartment Monday night, that Miss Carmody had smoked her unusual cigarets, and that they had played a game of their beloved banque.

"In the bedroom closet we found a hat and a pair of shoes identified by Miss Underhill, the French housekeeper,

and Miss Keaton, a maid in the French employ, as having been worn by Miss Carmody on Monday, the day of the murder, when she left the house and was not seen again. Another hat and another pair of shoes were missing from the closet, seeming to indicate that the girl had changed the damp ones she was wearing for the dry ones that were missing.

"So much for that." Ellery paused and looked about him, eyes glittering strangely. There was not the slightest sound from his audience. They seemed mesmerized, intent only on watching the slowly rising structure of damning evidence.

"To make an all-important point . . . Now that I knew that the apartment was the scene of the crime, the question inevitably arose: *Why was the body removed to the window downstairs?* What purpose did it serve? For it must have served some purpose—we saw too many signs of cunning, coördinated scheming to believe that the murderer was an arrant lunatic, doing things for no reason at all.

"The first alternative was that the body was removed to make it appear that the apartment was not the scene of the murder. But this did not follow from the facts, for if the murderer wished to remove all traces of the crime from the apartment, why did he not also remove the banque game, the cigaret-stubs, the shoes and the hat? True, if the body were not discovered or the murder not suspected, the finding of these articles would indicate no crime. But the murderer could not hope to conceal the body forever. Some day, somehow, it would be found, the apartment gone over, and the cards, cigarets and other things would point to the apartment as the place where the murder was committed.

"So, it was evident that the body was removed for another reason entirely. What could that be? The an-

swer came after thought—to *delay the discovery of the body*. How was this arrived at? Simple mental arithmetic. The exhibition was held every single day at noon sharp. This was an unvarying rule. The window was not entered until noon. These facts were common knowledge. If the body were hidden in that wall-bed the murderer had absolute assurance that it would not be discovered before twelve-fifteen. There was the good sharp reason ready made for us—the only gleam of light in the whole muddle, which was complicated by such questions as why the window was used at all when it had so many obvious disadvantages, and so on. So we had no doubt that the murderer took the trouble of carrying the body down six flights of stairs and into the exhibition-room because he knew that the body would not be found all the next morning.

“Logically, then, the question followed: Why did the murderer desire to delay the discovery of the body? Think it over and you will see that there can be only one convincing reason—because he had to do something on Tuesday morning which the discovery of the body would have rendered dangerous or even impossible!”

They were hanging on his words now breathlessly.

“How could this be?” asked Ellery, his eyes sparkling. “Let’s shift to a new tack for the moment. . . . No matter how the murderer entered the store, he must have stayed all night. He had three ways to enter, but no way to get out unobserved. He could have hidden in the store during the day; he could have come in after hours by the Employees’ Entrance; or he could have slipped into the building by the freight-door at eleven o’clock at night while the commissary truck was unloading the food supplies for the next day. The chances were that this last was the method used, for O’Flaherty had seen no one enter by his door, and coming in at eleven at night was better for the

murderer's purpose than having to stay in the store from five-thirty until midnight.

"But how to get out? O'Flaherty reports no one left by his door; all other exits were locked and bolted; and the freight-door on 39th Street was closed at eleven-thirty, fifteen minutes before Mrs. French even arrived at the store and a half-hour before she was murdered. So the criminal had no recourse but to stay in the store all night. Then he could not escape until nine the next morning, when the doors were opened to the public. At that time he could walk out of the store as if he were an early customer.

"But here another factor entered. If he could walk out of the store at nine, a free man, why couldn't he also attend to whatever business he had without the rigmarole of taking the body to the window in order to secure a delay? The point is that he *did* transfer the body. Then he *couldn't* walk out of the store at nine, a free man. He *needed* that delay. He had to stay in the store even after nine!"

Simultaneously there came a short gasp from different quarters of the room. Ellery looked around quickly, as if anxious to determine exactly who had been shocked into astonishment and perhaps fear.

"I see that several of you catch the inference on the wing," he said, smiling. "There could be only one reason to explain why our murderer had to stay in the store even after nine—and that is that *he was connected with the store!*"

This time incredulity, suspicion, dread were written on all those plastic faces. Every one drew unconsciously away from his neighbor, as if suddenly aware of the many persons which this last indictment might implicate.

"Yes, that is where we arrived finally," continued Ellery in an unemotional voice. "If our mysterious criminal were an employee of the store or connected with the store in

some official or even unofficial capacity, his absence on the discovery of a murder would certainly be noted. He could not afford to have his absence, which was evidently of paramount importance, noted. He was in a difficult position. The memorandum note"—he exhibited the blue slip on the desk before him—"left on this desk by Mr. Weaver overnight told the murderer that both Mr. Weaver and Mr. French would be in the apartment at nine o'clock the next morning. If he left the body in the apartment, the murder would be discovered at nine, the hue and cry raised, and he would never get his chance to slip out of the store and attend to his secret business. And even telephone calls might be watched. So he had to make sure the body was not discovered until he had time to slip away, or even telephone (for this would be untraceable if there was no reason to check calls). The only method which he knew would surely delay the discovery of the body was to hide it in the window-room. Which he did, and quite successfully.

"By this time we were able to clear up finally that minor point of how the murderer entered the building. We had the Monday time-chart. Our murderer must be, we said, an employee of the store or in some way connected with it. Yet the time-chart showed that every one had checked out regularly before or at five-thirty. Then the murderer must have entered the building by the freight-door, as the only means left.

"One other point, while we are on the subject of the murderer's desire to delay the discovery of the body. . . . It occurred to me, as no doubt it has occurred to you, that our mysterious criminal ran uncommon risks and embarked on numerous voyages of complication when he began to clean up the mess after his crime. For example—that he carried the body downstairs. But that is explained by the fact that he had to have time in the morning to attend to

this vague business, an item, incidentally, which we have not as yet explained. Also—why did he go to the trouble of securing a new felt, carefully mopping up the blood, and so on? Again this is answered by the need for time in the morning, and the fact that if a bloody book-end were found by Mr. Weaver, let us say, at nine o'clock a crime would be suspected at once, and undoubtedly the criminal's chance of getting his business done would be seriously jeopardized. Evidently then, what he had to do was of the most pressing importance—so pressing that he could not run the risk of the crime's even being suspected before that business was attended to. . . ."

Ellery paused and referred to a sheaf of paper which he took from his breast-pocket. "We must leave for the moment our general conclusion that the person we are seeking is connected officially or semi-officially with this establishment," he said at last. "Please bear that statement in mind while I veer off into another lane of speculation entirely. . . ."

"I brought to your attention a few moments ago four concrete evidences of the presence of Miss Bernice Carmody in this apartment on Monday night. These were, in the order in which we found them, the game of banque exclusively indulged in by Miss Carmody and her mother; the *La Duchesse* cigarets, violet-scented, known to be Miss Carmody's special brand; Miss Carmody's hat, which she was observed wearing on Monday afternoon when she disappeared from sight; and her shoes, which fit the same description.

"Now I shall show you that, far from proving that Miss Carmody was present here on Monday night, they prove exactly the contrary," continued Ellery briskly. "The banque game contributes nothing to our little refutation; the cards lay there in a legitimate array, and we must leave them for the present.

"The cigarets, however, present a more illuminating view of my contention. These"—he held up one of the ashtrays on the exhibit-table—"these cigaret-stubs were found on the table in the cardroom." He lifted one of the stubs from the tray and held it high. "As you can see, this cigaret has been almost entirely consumed—in fact, only the small strip which bears the brand imprint is left. Without exception, each of the ten or twelve cigarets in this ashtray have been uniformly smoked to the same tiny stub.

"On the other hand, in Miss Carmody's bedroom at the French house we found these stubs." He exhibited the second ashtray, picking out one of the cigarets from its cluttered, dusty depths to show to his audience. "You will observe that in the case of this stub, the cigarets, also a *La Duchesse* of course, has been little more than one-quarter consumed—Miss Carmody evidently having taken only five or six puffs before crushing the remainder in the tray. Every stub in this tray from Miss Carmody's bedroom has been similarly treated.

"In other words," he said with a bare smile, "we find the amusing phenomenon of two sets of cigarets, both presumably smoked by the same person, exhibiting distinctly opposite physical remains. On investigating, we discovered that Miss Carmody, for reasons soon to be clarified, is extremely nervous—so much so that none of those persons who know her best can recall any occasion on which she has not smoked her favorite cigarets in exactly this wasteful, convulsive manner.

"What is the inference?" A perceptible pause. "Merely that Miss Carmody did *not* smoke the cigarets we found on the cardroom table; that they were smoked or prepared by some one else who did not know Miss Carmody's unvarying method of throwing away cigarets one-quarter consumed. . . .

"Now, as for the shoes and hat," Ellery said without allowing his auditors time in which to digest this latest pronouncement, "we found further signs of a tampering hand. The appearance of things is that Miss Carmody was here Monday night, having been wet by the rain of the afternoon and evening, and that before leaving the apartment she changed her soaked hat and shoes, putting on others from the small stock of her clothing already in the bedroom closet. *But* we discovered that the hat had been inserted in a hat-box with its brim to the bottom. And that the shoes had been stuck into the shoe-bag with their heels projecting from the pocket.

"In testing the habituary nature of such a procedure, we considered that an overwhelming percentage of women put their hats away in hat-boxes with the crowns *to the bottom* and the brims to the top; also that when shoes have large buckles, as this pair has, they are put away with the heels inside, so that the buckles will not catch on the material of the bag. Yet both articles denoted this peculiar ignorance of feminine custom. Here the inference is also obvious—Miss Carmody did not put away those shoes and the hat; *a man did*. For it is the masculine custom to put hats away with the brim downward; and a man would not grasp the significance of the buckle. All the shoes in the rack had the heels showing, because none happened to have buckles; whoever put Miss Carmody's shoes in the rack automatically followed suit, which a woman would not have done.

"Now these points, taken by and of themselves, are, I will confess, rather weak and inconclusive. But when you put the three together, the evidence is too strong to be overlooked—it was not Miss Carmody who smoked the cigarettes and put away shoes and hat, but some one else—a man."

Ellery cleared away a huskiness in his throat. His tone was barbed with earnestness, despite a growing hoarseness.

"There is another item of considerable interest in this last connection," he continued. "In examining the lavatory inside, Mr. Weaver and I ran across an intriguing theft. A safety-razor blade of Mr. Weaver's, which he had used after five-thirty Monday afternoon and had cleaned and restored to the case because it was his last blade and he knew he would have to shave in the morning—this blade, I say, was missing on Tuesday morning. Mr. Weaver, who was busy Monday night and consequently forgot to put in a new supply of blades, came to the apartment Tuesday morning early—at eight-thirty, in fact, because he had to clear up some business and reports before the arrival of Mr. French at nine. He intended to shave in the apartment. The blade, which he had put away only the late afternoon before, was gone. Mr. French, let me explain, does not keep a razor, never shaving himself.

"Now why was the blade gone? Of course, it was plain that the blade must have been used Monday night or early Tuesday morning before Mr. Weaver arrived here. Who could have used it? One of two people—Mrs. French or her murderer. Mrs. French could have used it as a cutting instrument of some sort; or her murderer could have used it.

"Of the two alternatives, surely the second is more tenable. Remember that the criminal was constrained by circumstances to pass the night in the store. Where could he stay with most safety? Certainly in the apartment itself! He could not roam about the dark floors, or even hide among them with as great a margin of safety as in the apartment—not with the watchman prowling about all night! Now—we find a blade used. It suggests normally the process of shaving. Well, why not? We know that the murderer had to make an appearance in the morning as an employee or official of the store. Why shouldn't he shave while he was temporarily occupying the apartment?

It predicates a cold-blooded personality, but that is an argument for rather than an argument against it. Why is the blade missing? Evidently something happened to it. What could have happened to it? Did it break? Why not! The blade had been used a few times; it was brittle. A little extra force in screwing the parts of the razor together, and the blade might easily have snapped. Let us suppose that this happened. Why didn't the murderer merely leave the broken blade? Because the murderer is a canny scoundrel and in his own way an excellent psychologist. If a broken blade remains it is more likely to be recalled that it was *not* broken at a former date than to take it for granted that the blade *was* broken at that former date. If the blade is missing there is no incentive to suspicion or memory. An altered object is a more vigorous mental stimulant than a missing one. At least, that is what I should have thought if I had been in the murderer's place; and in effect I believe the person who planned this affair did the correct thing in taking away the blade—correct according to his lights. The proof is that Mr. Weaver thought little or nothing of the missing blade until I probed it out of him; and then it was only because I brought to the investigation an unprejudiced, impersonal observation."

Ellery grinned a little. "I have been working on presumptions and more or less feeble deductions, as you can see; yet if you put together all the scattered, flimsy facts which I have outlined in the past ten minutes, I think you will see that common sense simply cries out that the blade was used for shaving, that it was broken, and that it was taken away. We find no evidence that the blade might have been used for anything but its legitimate purpose; and this only strengthens the contention. Let me leave this line of thought temporarily and go to another, altogether

different, and in its way one of the most significant in the entire investigation."

There was a surreptitious rustling of bodies in hard chairs, a quick intake of breaths. The eyes on Ellery did not waver.

"It may have come to you," he said in a quiet, merciless voice, "that more than one person could have been implicated in this affair; that, perhaps, if Miss Carmody did not put away her shoes and hat—disregarding the damning evidence of the cigarets—she still might have been present; for another—a man—could have disposed of the shoes and hat while she stood by or did something else. I shall disprove that with the most gratifying expedition."

He put his palms flat on the desk, leaned slightly forward. "Who, ladies and gentlemen, had rightful access to this apartment? Answer: The five possessors of the keys. That is—Mr. French, Mrs. French, Miss Carmody, Miss Marion French, and Mr. Weaver. The master key in O'Flaherty's desk was closely guarded, and no one could have got it without either his knowledge or the knowledge of the day man, O'Shane. And no such knowledge exists, which makes it plain that the master key in no way enters our calculations.

"Of the six keys *in esse*, as it were, we are now able to account for five. Mrs. French's is missing. All the others are absolutely accounted for as having been exclusively in the possession of their owners. Mrs. French's key has been sought for by the combined cunning of the detective force. It is still missing. In other words, it is not on these premises, despite the fact that O'Flaherty positively avers that Mrs. French had it in her possession when she entered the store Monday night.

"I told you at the beginning of this impromptu demonstration that the murderer probably took that key. Now

I tell you not only that he took it, but that *he had to take it*.

"We have one confirmation in fact that the criminal *wanted* a key. On Monday afternoon, some time after Miss Carmody left the French house furtively, Miss Underhill, the housekeeper, received a telephone call. The caller claimed to be Miss Carmody. The caller asked Miss Underhill to have Miss Carmody's key to the apartment ready, that a messenger would be sent for it at once. Yet only the very same morning, Miss Carmody had told Miss Underhill that she had lost her key, she thought, and asked Miss Underhill to secure one of the other keys and make a duplicate for her!

"Miss Underhill doubts that the caller was Miss Carmody. She is ready to swear that some one stood by the telephone at the other end and prompted the caller's reply when Miss Underhill reminded the caller about the lost key and the morning's instructions. The caller then hung up in some confusion. . . .

"What is the inference? Surely that the caller was not Miss Carmody, but a hireling or accomplice of the murderer, who prompted the call in order to secure a key to the apartment!"

Ellery drew a long breath. "I leave you for the moment to your own cogitations on the interesting reflections this incident raises. . . . Now let me conduct you through a logical maze to another conclusion—the one with which I began this branch of my thesis.

"Why did the murderer want a key? Obviously, to secure a means of access to the apartment. He could not get in except through the agency of a second person who possessed a key, if he had not one himself. Presumably he expected to be admitted to the apartment by Mrs. French, but in the careful planning of the crime the possession of a key for himself might conceivably be im-

portant, and this explains the call and the projected 'messenger.' But to the case in point!

"The criminal killed Mrs. French in the apartment. Now that he had a corpse and knew that he must take it down into the window-room, for the various reasons I have given, he pulled up with a sudden thought. He knew that the door to the apartment had a spring lock that snapped shut. He had no key, having failed in his effort to get hold of Bernice Carmody's. He must carry the body out of the apartment. Yet he had much to do in the apartment afterward—clean up the evidences of blood, 'plant' the shoes and hat, the banque game and cigarets. As a matter of fact, even if he cleaned up the room and 'planted' the false evidence before he took the body down, he still needed means of reëntry into the apartment. He had to pussyfoot through the store for the felt, the glue, and other paraphernalia needed to fix the book-ends. How was he to get back into the apartment? He also meant to sleep in the apartment, apparently—again, how was he to get back? You see, whether he took the body downstairs before or after he cleaned up, he still needed a means of reëntry to the apartment. . . .

"His first thought must have been to insert something between the door and the floor to keep the sprung door from clicking shut. But what about the watchmen? He must have thought: 'The watchmen make rounds through this corridor by the hour. They will be sure to notice a partly open door and investigate.' No, the door had to be closed. But—a thought! Mrs. French had a key, her own key—the one by which she herself entered the apartment. He would use that. We can picture him opening her bag while she lay, bleeding and dead, across the desk, finding the key, putting it into his own pocket, picking up the corpse and leaving the apartment, now certain of a

means of reëntering it when he was through with his grisly task.

"*But*"—and Ellery smiled grimly—"he had to bring the key back upstairs with him, obviously, to get into the apartment again. Therefore we didn't find it on the body. True, he might have gone upstairs, done his cleaning up, and then taken the key downstairs again. But—of course that's inane—how would he get back again? Besides, the danger he would encounter—taking still another chance of being detected on the main floor getting into the window. . . . It was dangerous enough the first time, but that was inescapable. No, he probably figured that the best thing he could do would be to pocket the key and dispose of it when he left the building in the morning. True, he might have left it in the apartment, on the card-table for example. But the fact that it isn't in the apartment shows that he took it away with him—he had two alternatives and chose one of them.

"We find then—" Ellery paused for the merest instant—"that our criminal committed the murder *without accomplices*.

"I see doubt on some faces. But surely it is quite clear. If he had an accomplice, he wouldn't have been forced to take the key at all! . . . He would have carried the body downstairs, and his accomplice would have remained in the apartment to open the door for him when he was finished downstairs. Don't you see? The very fact that he had to take the key shows that it was a one-man job. I might be confronted with the objection: 'Well, it could have been two people at that, because both might have carried the body downstairs.' To that I reply with certainty, 'No!' because it would have involved a double risk—two people would have been easier to detect by a watchman than one. This crime is well thought out—the author

of it would never have taken this unnecessary chance of discovery."

Ellery stopped abruptly and stared down at his notes. No one moved. When he looked up there was a tightness about his lips that revealed an inward strain whose cause no one there could guess.

"I have now reached the point, ladies and gentlemen," he announced in a calm flat voice, "where I can go to some length in describing our elusive criminal. Would you care to hear my description?"

He looked about the room, challenging them with his eyes. Bodies rigid through excitement sagged in reaction. Every one averted his head. There was no sound from them.

"I take it that you would," said Ellery in the same flat voice, which contained a note of amused menace. "Very well, then!"

He leaned forward, eyes glittering. "Our murderer is a man. The tactics employed in putting the shoes and hat into the closet plus the evidence of the missing blade point to this masculinity. The physical energy required in disposing of the body and the rest; the mental agility, with its recurrent traces of hard common sense; the cold-bloodedness, the unscrupulosity—all these point unerringly to a masculine figure with, if you will, a fairly heavy beard which requires daily shaving."

They followed the movements of his lips with bated breaths.

"Our man worked alone, without accomplices. The deductions from the missing key, which I have gone into at great length, point to this."

There was not a tremor of movement in the room.

"Our lone man is connected with the store. The removal of the body to the window downstairs and all its

attendant complications, which I have also expounded at some length, prove this."

Ellery relaxed slightly. Again he looked about the room with a little smile. He applied his handkerchief to his lips, glanced slyly at Commissioner Welles, who sat perspiring and alert in his chair; at his father, who was slumped in an attitude of weariness, one fragile hand shielding his eyes; at the motionless detectives to his left; at Velie, Crouther, "Jimmy," and Fiorelli to his right. Then he began once more.

"On one point," he said dryly, "we have as yet reached no definite conclusion. I refer to the nature of the business which the murderer considered so imperative as to require special attention Tuesday morning. . . .

"Which brings me to the most absorbing subject of the five books which we discovered on this desk—that interesting mélange of paleontology, elementary music, commerce of the *moyen age*, philately, and bad vaudeville jokes."

Ellery launched into a short, graphic description of the five strange volumes, the markings, Weaver's story of Springer's duplicity, the revelation that the addresses were drug-distributing depots, and finally the unsuccessful raid on the house at the 98th Street address, taken from the sixth book in Weaver's possession.

"When Springer prepared the sixth book," continued Ellery, to his ever-tensing audience, "we can assume that he had no suspicion that the book-code was being tampered with or known to an outsider. If he had, he would not have prepared the book and left it for Mr. Weaver's investigating fingers. So that, when Springer left the store on Monday night, followed by Mr. Weaver, he did not know that this sixth book, *Modern Trends in Interior Decoration*, by Lucian Tucker, was in our young amateur detective's possession. And since Springer met and spoke to no one all evening, even when he arrived at his Bronx

apartment (for we have checked up through the telephone company and found that he did not make any telephone calls when he got home), he could not therefore have known that the book-system had been tampered with until, at the very earliest, the next morning, Tuesday, when he returned to work. In other words, after the murder. If we presume that not Springer, but some one else, would have been apprised by an outsider of the discovery of the code system, we must not forget that the only method by which any one could have communicated with another about the matter from the store would be by telephoning, since he could not leave the store during the night. And we discovered that the telephone service at this store is cut off at night, with the exception of one trunk line leading to O'Flaherty's desk; and this was not used, according to O'Flaherty's own testimony.

"Then we are forced to conclude that it was impossible for any one in the store Monday night and early Tuesday morning to have communicated with Springer or any one else about the missing sixth book, which Weaver took away with him."

Ellery forged ahead rapidly. "The fact that the system of dope distribution was disorganized the next morning, Tuesday—as it was, for the sudden abandonment of the 98th Street house on Tuesday afternoon is clear evidence—could have been due only to some one of the drug ring discovering during the night that the system was being tampered with. I repeat here the fact that Springer went ahead on Monday evening with his regular task of codifying the sixth book, showing that up to that time the ring considered their system safe. Yet by next morning they had become alarmed and fled the 98th Street rendezvous, even before catering to their addict-customers. Again, then, the logical explanation is that it was during the previous night that some one discovered something wrong.

"This discovery could have been caused only by, first, noticing the absence of the sixth book from its accustomed shelf in the Book Department Monday night after Weaver left—the last one to check out of the store; second, finding the five duplicate books on Mr. French's desk Monday night; or third, both. We must conclude therefore that, since the disorganization did take place the morning after the crime, it could have only been ordered by some one who made one or both of these discoveries Monday night. Some one—to amplify—who must have been in the store after Springer and Weaver left, and who therefore could not get out of the store or communicate with any one until at least nine o'clock Tuesday morning."

Dawning comprehension shone from several faces before him. Ellery smiled. "I see that some of you are anticipating the inevitable conclusion. . . . Who in the store that night was in a position to make one or both of these bibliographical discoveries? The answer is: the murderer, the man who killed Mrs. French in the room in which the five books were prominently in sight. Is there anything about the murderer's subsequent actions which proves that he *did* make the discovery of the five books in the apartment? Yes, there is. The fact that the murderer removed the body to the window-room in order to give himself time next morning to attend to his 'business'—which until this point has been obscure. . . .

"The deductive chain, ladies and gentlemen," said Ellery in a curiously triumphant voice, "is too strong and perfectly welded to be anything but truth. *The murderer warned the drug ring Tuesday morning.*

"In other words, to add an element to our growing description—our murderer is a man, who worked alone, who is connected with the store, and who belongs to a large, well-organized drug ring."

He paused, fingered the five books on the desk with sen-

sitive fingers. "Furthermore, we are now in a position to add another qualifying item to the growing description of the murderer.

"For had our drug-distributing murderer been present in the French apartment *before* the night of the murder—and by 'before' I mean at any time within five weeks prior to the fatal night—he would have seen the books on the table, would have become suspicious, would have at once ordered the cessation of the book-code operations in the Book Department. And since up to the very night of the murder the book system was still in effect, it follows most gracefully that the murderer had not been in the French library for between one and five weeks before Monday night last. . . . We have confirmation that it was the murderer again who saw those books on the desk. For in examining and later fixing the damaged book-ends, he could scarcely have missed seeing—and understanding to his horror the significance of—the five volumes. . . .

"As a matter of fact," continued Ellery swiftly, "there is no difficulty in deducing that the murderer, upon seeing the incriminating books on this desk, immediately stole downstairs to the Book Department with a flashlight to determine whether the sixth book had been tampered with also. And of course he would have found it gone—the climax-capping discovery which would make it imperative for him to get word to his confederates that the game was up. This is a decently reasonable conjecture which very soon, I am happy to announce, we shall be able to check more positively!"

And with this he stopped short, mopped his forehead with his handkerchief, and polished the lenses of his pince-nez with absent fingers. This time a ripple of conversation disturbed the quiet atmosphere, beginning in a minor cadence that swelled to excited proportions, only to cease abruptly when Ellery lifted a hand for silence.

"To make the analysis complete," he resumed, restoring his glasses to his nose, "I shall now become perhaps objectionably personal. For I mean to take up, one by one, each of you and measure you by the yardstick I have constructed in this analysis!"

Instantly the room was a babel of exclamations, expressions of anger, resentment, bewilderment, uncomfortable self-interest. Ellery shrugged his shoulders, turned toward Commissioner Welles. The Commissioner said "Yes!" in a decisive tone and glared at the people assembled before him. They subsided, muttering.

Ellery turned back to his audience with a half-smile. "Really," he said, "I have not sprung my greatest surprise by any means. So there is little cause for protest on the part of any one here—or should I say nearly any one? At any rate, let's begin this fascinating little game of elimination.

"From the first unit on my yardstick—the fact that the murderer is a man—" he said, "we may at once absolve, even as an intellectual exercise, Miss Marion French, Miss Bernice Carmody, and Mrs. Cornelius Zorn.

"The second unit—that this man worked alone—is irrelevant and useless to determine identity, so we will proceed to the third unit, which is that the murderer, a man, is connected with this establishment. And to the fourth, which is that the murderer has not been in this apartment within the past five weeks.

"There is, first, Mr. Cyrus French." Ellery bowed insouciantly to the feeble old millionaire. "Mr. French is certainly connected with this establishment. Mr. French, further, could have committed the crime, if you judge physical possibility a factor. I demonstrated privately not long ago that, had Mr. French bribed the chauffeur of his host, Mr. Whitney, to take him into the City from Great Neck on Monday night and forget about it, he could have

arrived at this apartment in sufficient time to slip through the freight entrance and into the apartment. He was not seen again, except by the chauffeur, after he retired to his room in the Whitney house at nine o'clock Monday night complaining of a slight indisposition.

"However—" Ellery smiled at the purpling face of French—"Mr. French has certainly been in this room within the past five weeks—every day, in fact, for years. And if this seems inconclusive, Mr. French, rest easy. For there is another reason, that thus far I have purposely neglected to mention, which makes your culpability a psychological impossibility."

French relaxed, a vague smile lifting the corners of his tremulous old mouth. Marion squeezed his hand. "Now," said Ellery busily, "Mr. John Gray, donor of the entangled book-ends and close friend to the French family. You, Mr. Gray," he said gravely, directly addressing the spruce old director, "are eliminated on a number of counts. Although you are connected with the store in a very important capacity, and although your absence on Tuesday morning would have been seriously noticed, you too have been a frequent visitor to these rooms during the past five weeks; in fact, you attended a meeting here on Friday, I believe. And you had an alibi for Monday night which we checked up and found stronger than even you believe. For not only does the night-man at your hotel desk confirm your statement that you were talking with him at eleven-forty Monday night, making it impossible for you to have entered the store, but another person, unknown to you—a fellow-resident at the same apartment hotel—saw you enter your suite at eleven-forty-five. . . . Even without this we could not seriously have entertained a thought of your guilt, for we had no reason to believe that your friend the night-clerk is anything but an honest man. No more reason, in fact, than that Mr. Whitney's chauffeur, in

the case of Mr. French, is dishonest. In Mr. French's case I merely mentioned the bribe as an eventuality, improbable but certainly within the realm of possibility."

Gray sank back with a curious sigh, dug his small hands into the pockets of his coat. Ellery turned to red-faced, nervous Cornelius Zorn, who was fumbling with his watch-chain. "Mr. Zorn, your alibi was weak, and you could have, with perjured testimony on the part of Mrs. Zorn, committed the murder. But although you are a prominent official of the store, you too have been in this room at least once weekly for many months. And you, too, as well as Mr. French and Mr. Gray, are further absolved by this psychological inadmissibility of which I spoke before.

"Mr. Marchbanks," continued Ellery, turning to the heavy-set, lowering brother of the dead woman, "your story about the automobile trip to Long Island and staying overnight at your house in Little Neck, unseen by any one who might vouch for your presence, also made it physically possible for you to have returned to the city in time to get into the store and commit the murder. But you needn't have been so irate yesterday—you are absolved too by this secret point of mine, besides being eliminated, as a regular attendant here at the directorial conferences, on the same account as Mr. Zorn.

"And Mr. Trask—" Ellery's tone hardened slightly—"although you were drunk and rolling about the streets—" Trask's jaw dropped in vapid astonishment—"on Monday night and Tuesday morning, you, too, are set free by my yardstick, as well as by my as yet undivulged item."

Ellery paused, looked contemplatively at the stony, dark features of Vincent Carmody. "Mr. Carmody. In many respects you deserve our apologies and genuine commiserations. You were entirely eliminated from our speculations by the fact that you are in no way connected with the store. Had you committed the murder, despite your story

of the night trip to Connecticut, which was unsubstantiated and might have been false, there would have been no necessity for taking the body of Mrs. French downstairs to the window-room. Because you could have walked out of the store at nine o'clock unrestrained by any fear that your absence might be noticed. You did not belong in the store at all. You, too, incidentally, are eliminated further by my charming and mysterious little point.

"And now," continued Ellery, turning to the disturbed Gallic features of Paul Lavery, "we come to you. Don't be afraid!" he smiled—"you didn't commit the crime! I was so certain that I did not even bother to ask you for a statement of your movements on Monday night. You have been in this apartment daily for weeks. Besides, you came here directly from France only a short time ago—it was quite beyond the area of probability to suspect you, therefore, of being embroiled in a gang of drug-peddlers operating with intense organization in this city and country. And you, too, cannot very well be our murderer, since you do not logically measure up to my last point, still withheld. And, if I were to be minutely psychiatric, I might add that a man of your refined and Continental intelligence would never have committed the regrettable mistakes which got our esteemed *mysterioso* into trouble. For I do believe that, out of all of us, you alone would have been man-of-the-world enough to know how a woman puts her hat into a hat-box, and how she stores buckled shoes in a shoe-bag. . . .

"We have now," continued Ellery pleasantly, but there was a feverish glitter in his eye, "narrowed the field of inquiry considerably. We might discuss, of course, Mr. MacKenzie, the general manager, who is an employee of the store. No, no! Mr. MacKenzie, don't rise to protest—we've eliminated you already. Because of this last point of ours, which is almost ready for exposition, and because

you have been in this apartment within five weeks. But any of the hundreds of employees of the store who have *never* been in this apartment and whose movements Monday night are unaccounted for, might be the murderer. We'll come to that in a moment. At this time, ladies and gentlemen—" Ellery made a sharp sign to Patrolman Bush at the anteroom door, who immediately bobbed his head and went out, leaving the door open behind him—"at this time I wish to present to you a gentleman who until now has been more or less of an unknown quantity; no less a personage than—" there was a flurry at the outer door; it opened and Bush entered, followed by a detective who held a white-faced man, manacled, tightly by the elbow—"Mr. James Springer!"

Ellery retreated slightly, a grim smile on his face. The detective escorted his prisoner to the front of the room, where two chairs were immediately set by one of the attendant policemen. The two men sat down, Springer holding his manacled hands limply in his lap, staring steadfastly at the floor. He was a middle-aged man with sharp features and grey hair; a livid bruise on his right cheek was mute evidence of a recent scuffle.

Everybody in the room stared at him wordlessly. Old French was speechless with rage at the sight of the employee who had betrayed him. Weaver and Marion both laid restraining hands on his shaking arm. But there were no words in that audience—only hot eager glances, and in one case a frozen steady immutability. . . .

"Mr. Springer," said Ellery quietly—yet his voice exploded like a shell in the strained atmosphere of the room—"Mr. Springer has been kind enough to turn State's evidence. Mr. Springer, who ran away with the deluded thought that he might successfully evade the police, was caught the very day he attempted to escape because we were prepared for it. Mr. Springer's capture has been kept

very quiet. Mr. Springer has cleared up many little items of procedure which we could not possibly have deduced.

"For example, that the murderer is his chief in the drug ring, which even now is being scattered and pursued throughout the country. That the murderer is the right-hand man of the eloquently termed 'master mind' of the drug ring in this city. That Miss Bernice Carmody, who we discovered by investigation was probably a drug addict in an advanced stage, had come under the influence of the heroin habit, had met by devious ways the 'master mind,' had been introduced to the code-system, had become so dependent upon the drug that she willingly solicited new customers from her social circle, becoming in a way therefore almost a member of the ring. That Miss Carmody's pernicious addiction was unsuspected by her family until, as we know, her father, Mr. Carmody, began to suspect and told his former wife, Mrs. French, what he suspected; and Mrs. French, observing, saw that it was true. That Mrs. French, in her assertive way, directly accused her daughter of addiction and finally broke down the girl's weakened will until she confessed everything—including the name of the man connected with the French store who was supplying her directly with her own drugs. That Mrs. French, who we may suppose did not inform her husband of the true state of affairs because of his violent aversion to this form of vice, on Monday took away from Miss Carmody the newly replenished supply of drugs which she kept in the false bottom of her specially made lipstick. That Mrs. French further forced her daughter to make an appointment for her with this man, this employee in her husband's store, for Monday night at midnight, secretly, to plead with him for her daughter—to force him, by threats of disclosing to the police what she now knew about the drug organization, to loose his grip on her daughter and allow the girl to be cured secretly by her mother. That

this appointment was made on Sunday through Miss Carmody. That this man immediately reported the alarming state of affairs to his chief, the ubiquitous 'master mind,' who in his customary cold-blooded fashion commanded him to kill Mrs. French, who by now, in turn, was in possession of too much vital information to be allowed to live; and also to do away with Miss Carmody, who had proved a weak cog in the machine and must also be disposed of. That this man, under threat of being killed himself, laid his plans and made his appointment. That he entered secretly through the freight-door, which as an employee of the store he knew was open at that exact half-hour each night. That he waited until midnight in a store lavatory and then made his way stealthily to the apartment on the sixth floor, knocked, and was admitted by Mrs. French, who had arrived a few minutes before. That she stood by the desk, as we deduced, and they argued; that he was not aware of the heroin-filled lipstick in her bag, or he would have taken it; that without hesitation he shot and killed Mrs. French, who bled profusely, the blood staining the book-end; that on bending over the desk he saw the five books, and realized that some one had been tampering with the code-system; that he saw the blue memorandum announcing the arrival next morning at nine of Mr. Weaver and Mr. French; that he realized he could not communicate with any one of the ring about this latest unforeseen development, because he was unable to get out before the next morning and could not telephone; that he therefore decided to hide the body in the exhibition-window, which would give him ample time next morning to slip away and warn his gang, for if the body were left in the apartment and discovered at nine, he would be unable for precautionary reasons to leave the building; and finally that he disposed of the body where we found it. Also that on his way back he stopped at the Book Department on the main

floor and confirmed his suspicion that the sixth book was also missing. That he took Mrs. French's key back with him, having been unsuccessful in his attempt to get Bernice Carmody's that afternoon by the ruse of the telephone call. Finally, that he cleaned up the apartment, fixed the book-end, 'planted' the evidence against Miss Carmody, stayed overnight, shaved in the morning, broke the blade and took it away with him; and slipped out shortly after nine, emerging with the early shoppers only to reënter the building at once through the regular Employees' Entrance, in order to be checked in officially. And that he managed soon after to sneak off and warn his gang leader of the discovery of the book-system. . . ."

Ellery cleared his throat, went on relentlessly. "Mr. Springer was also kind enough to clear up the matter of Miss Carmody's abduction. With the action of Mrs. French on Sunday of taking away her store of the drug, the girl became desperate and got in touch with the murderer. This fitted in with his plans—he told her to come to a rendezvous in the lower part of the city for a new supply. She went on Monday afternoon and was promptly abducted, being taken by confederates to a Brooklyn hide-away and murdered. Her clothes were confiscated and brought back to our murderer, who had as yet committed no capital crime. These clothes the murderer brought with him to the apartment Monday night—the hat and shoes, tied up innocently in a small parcel, but wet a trifle with rain to make the deception perfect.

"There is only one thing more to explain before proceeding to the much-wished-for *dénouement*. . . . And that is the reason for 'planting' the banque game, cigars, shoes and hat to make it appear as if Bernice herself had been implicated in the crime. And this, too, was outlined—under protest—by Mr. Springer, who has been just

a cog—an important cog, perhaps—in the vicious wheel. . . .

"The murderer left evidences of Miss Carmody's presence because she had necessarily vanished. Since she had been murdered and would be missing, there was a logical reason for connecting the two events—the disappearance of the girl and the murder of her mother. It would seem perhaps as if the girl had committed the crime. Since this was untrue, the murderer felt that it might confuse the police and put them off the real track. The murderer did not really hope that the deception would be successful for long—it was merely another red herring drawn across the trail, and anything which would lead the scent away from him in another direction he felt was desirable. And the actual 'framing' required little enough trouble and work. The cigarets he secured from Xanthos', Miss Carmody's tobacconist, since she had once told him where she secured her private supply. The banque he knew about from Miss Carmody, also. The rest was child's play. . . ."

They were sitting on the edge of the hard camp-chairs now, straining forward to catch every syllable. Occasionally they looked at each other in a puzzled manner, as if unable to see clearly to the end of the analysis. Ellery brought them back to attention with his next words.

"Springer!" The name cracked out sharply. The prisoner started, paled, looked up furtively. His eyes fell at once to the carpet he had been studiously observing. "Springer, have I given your story faithfully—and completely?"

The man's eyes fluttered in a sudden agony, rolled in their sockets, wildly seeking a face in the swaying crowd before him. When he spoke, it was in a husky monotone, barely audible to those avid ears.

"Yes."

"Very well, then!" exclaimed Ellery, leaning forward, his tone keenly triumphant. "I have still to expatiate upon that unspoken point which I termed mysterious a few moments ago. . . .

"You will recall that I spoke of the book-ends and the few grains of powder stuck in the glue between the onyx and the new felt. That powder was ordinary fingerprint powder.

"From the moment that I was certain of the nature of the powder, the veils dissipated before my eyes and I sensed the truth. We thought at first, ladies and gentlemen," he continued, "that the use of fingerprint powder by the criminal indicated a very superior sort of murderer—a supercriminal, in fact. One who would use the implements of the police's own trade—it was a natural thought. . . .

"But"—and the word lashed into them with deadly emphasis—"there was another inference to be drawn—an inference which in a fell swoop eliminated all suspects but one. . . ." His eyes flashed fire; the hoarseness disappeared from his voice. He leaned forward carefully, over the desk with its litter of clues, holding them with the magnetism of his personality. "All suspects—but one . . ." he repeated slowly.

After a pregnant moment he said: "That one is the man who was employed by this store; who had not been in this room for at least five weeks; who attempted to put us off the track of himself by getting an accomplice without a record to give false information about the 'movements' of Bernice Carmody, who was already dead, in fact; who at the same time was clever enough to say, when he saw that we believed Miss Carmody to have been 'framed,' that he thought so, too, despite the fact that he himself had done the framing; who was present—the only suspect to be present, by the way—when the full story of the codified

books and the culpability of Springer was told, and who took the very first opportunity of warning Springer to flee, realizing that, with Springer caught, he himself was in serious danger; *who, most important of all, was the only personality connected with this investigation to whom the use of fingerprint powder was natural and thoroughly logical. . . .*"

He stopped abruptly, eyes fixed with interest, expectancy, the eagerness of the chase, upon one corner of the room.

"*Watch him, Velie!*" he cried suddenly, in a piercing voice.

Before they could turn, before they could grasp the significance of the scene enacted before them so swiftly and vitally, there came the sounds of a short violent struggle, a bull-like bellow of rage, the hoarse panting of breaths, and finally one sharp stupendous deafening report. . . .

Ellery stood limply, wearily in his fixed position at the desk. He did not move while they rushed concertedly from all sides of the room to the quiet spot where the body of a man lay, already stiff in death, in a pool of blood.

It was Inspector Queen who reached that contorted body first, by a lightning leap; who knelt quickly on the carpet, motioning aside the red-faced, heaving figure of Sergeant Velie; who turned the convulsed corpse of the suicide over; who muttered in words inaudible even to the nearest spectator:

"No legal evidence—and the bluff worked! . . . Thank God for a son. . . ."

The face was the face of the head store detective, William Crouther.

THE END

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